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## Islam and Civil Society

### Case Studies from Jordan and Egypt

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# DIIS REPORT

## **ISLAM AND CIVIL SOCIETY**

CASE STUDIES FROM JORDAN AND EGYPT

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The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: 'Every Muslim has to give in charity'. The people then asked: '(But what) if someone has nothing to give, what should he do?' The Prophet replied: 'He should work with his hands and benefit himself and also give in charity (from what he earns)'. The people further asked: 'If he cannot find even that?' He replied: 'He should help the needy who appeal for help'. Then the people asked: 'If he cannot do (even) that?' The Prophet said finally: 'Then he should perform good deeds and keep away from evil deeds, and that will be regarded as charitable deeds.'

*Sahih al-Bukhari, Volume 2, Hadith 524*

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## **Abstract**

There is a long-standing tradition among scholars and journalists to focus on the politisation of Islam while analysing the role of religion in Middle Eastern society. In particular, Islamist movements and regimes have captured the attention of western observers, often at the expense of those Muslim actors who do not have an explicit political agenda. Therefore, a more comprehensive understanding of the role of Islam in Middle Eastern societies calls for the inclusion of the wide variety of Muslim civil society organisations who are primarily engaged in social and cultural activities such as social welfare organisations, development NGO's, charities, youth movements, health clinics or various educational institutions.

Through two independent case studies, the present report provides concrete empirical examples of such actors, paying particular attention to the role Islam plays in these organisations. The case study on Jordan focuses on the sector of social welfare organisations in the country, illustrating the broad spectrum of different Muslim discourses and practices found in Jordanian civil society. The case study on Egypt focuses more specifically on a smaller group of recently established youth organisations, presenting new ways of organising and of using Islam in this process. Based on interviews with staff, volunteers and beneficiaries, the two studies present detailed descriptions of these different organisations, discussing topics such as charity versus development, youth and volunteerism, concepts of social and individual change, motives for participation as well as the relationship with the state and the Muslim Brotherhood, and exploring the different ways in which Islam plays a role in relation to these topics.

## Preface

The politicisation of Islam has dominated contemporary debates on the Middle East. In particular, since the terror attacks of September 11, 2001, the media coverage of the region and scholarly work on Islam have focussed on topics such as Islamist ideologies, religious radicalism, terrorist networks and fundamentalist movements. However, in order to comprehend the role of Islam in Middle Eastern societies, we must also shift our focus to Muslim actors who do not play an explicitly political role. There exists a broad range of Muslim organisations<sup>1</sup> in Middle Eastern civil societies today that tend to escape our attention. These organisations comprise a puzzling variety of charity associations, development NGOs, youth clubs, health clinics and schools, which are primarily engaged in social and cultural activities. Although they may be less conspicuous, these Muslim civil society organisations represent a much broader and possibly more important dimension of public religious engagement in Middle Eastern societies than their (in)famous political counterparts.

Looking at religious civil society organisations in Jordan and Egypt, the aim of this report is to enhance our understanding of the role of Islam in the Middle East beyond the sphere of directly visible political action. In this way, we also hope to make a contribution to a more nuanced understanding of Islam and Muslim actors in the region. The report has a predominantly descriptive aim, mapping sectors of civil society in Jordan and Egypt and presenting some concrete examples of the role religion plays in this multiplicity of different organisations.

The report is the first outcome of the research project *Islam and Civil Society Organisations in Jordan and Egypt*, anchored within the research unit *Religion, Social Conflict and the Middle East* at the Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS). The project goes back to an initial idea of Marie Juul Petersen's. Together with Sara Lei Sparre, we designed a short-term research project, limited to one year, which was then carried out by Sara Lei Sparre and Marie Juul Petersen under my supervision.

In the course of our research, we made two important observations, bringing into question some of our initial assumptions about religion and civil society. First of all,

<sup>1</sup> Please refer to Chapter 1, section 1.4.2. for a clarification of our use of the terms Muslim and Islamic in relation to organisations.



the analytical distinction between religious and secular<sup>2</sup> civil society organisations becomes increasingly blurred when one enters the field. There is no clear-cut boundary consistently demarcating Muslim from secular organisations. Looking at different levels of analysis – individual, organisational, actions, ideologies – the religious and the secular often intersect in cross-cutting ways. Secondly, the kinds of religiosity we can observe in these organisations are not easy to define and often ambiguous in character. Religiosity is, in other words, not a straight-forward characterisation. Groups and individuals employ religious discourses in a variety of ways, interpreting Islam along a fluid continuum between the extreme poles of radical Islamist ideologies and liberal-secular versions of personal religiosity. They sometimes mix traditional practices and norms with entirely new religious interpretations and secular values, constructing and re-constructing Islam according to the social and intellectual environments in which they move.

Given this background, our research is still in its initial phase. There is no doubt that we have to look more deeply into the meaning that religion in general and Islam in particular can acquire in the larger context of public engagement in Middle Eastern societies. Thus this report does not come to final conclusions or hastily drawn suggestions for policy advice. Our aim is more modest. The following pages present some of our very preliminary findings on the topic, which we nevertheless think are well worth sharing with our readers. We sincerely intend to develop this research further, aiming at the publication of an academic volume in due course.

We would like to express our gratitude to both the Royal Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and DIIS for funding and facilitating this research project. Likewise, we wish to express our special gratitude to the numerous people in both Jordan and Egypt who consented to be interviewed, offering us their time and expertise. These include researchers, university professors, journalists, governmental representatives, and – most importantly – representatives from civil society organisations. Last, but not least, we would like to thank all the people who offered us their help in practical matters, including in particular our assistants.

*Dietrich Jung, Copenhagen, October 2007*

<sup>2</sup> The term "secular" is here used in the sense "not religious".

## **I. Introduction**

### **I.1 Objectives and scope of the project**

This report is the first output of the research project *Islam and Civil Society Organisations in Jordan and Egypt*, based at the Danish Institute for International Studies and financed by the Royal Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The overall objective of the project has been to contribute to a more nuanced knowledge and understanding of the role of Islam and Muslim actors in Middle Eastern societies through case studies of civil society organisations in Jordan and Egypt. Since this is a field which is relatively uncharted among both academics and practitioners, the report aims to provide concrete examples of existing civil society organisations and the role Islam plays in these. As such, it is our hope that the report will also serve as input to current discussions among NGOs and policy-makers of the feasibility and desirability of practical cooperation and partnerships with religious organisations.

The selection of our two case studies was guided by considerations such as accessibility to the field, available literature, pre-established contacts and relevance for Danish foreign policy. Therefore, this report does not claim to present a comparative case study of Muslim civil society organisations in Jordan and Egypt. On the contrary, the two chapters have distinct characters, putting the focus on those kinds of actors that appeared to be the most relevant phenomena to study. The chapter on Jordan focuses on the broad sector of social welfare organisations, which make up almost half of all civil society organisations in the country and provide an excellent illustration of the wide spectrum of different religious discourses and practices found in civil society organisations. The chapter on Egypt focuses more specifically on a smaller group of recently established youth organisations which in many ways present new ways of organising as well as using and interpreting Islam in this process. Thus, while conducted within the same overall framework of Islam and civil society, the two chapters reflect two different case studies which can be read independently of one another.

### **I.2 Project design**

The project was designed and carried out by the authors of this report, Sara Lei Sparre and Marie Juul Petersen, working as research assistants under the supervision of senior researcher Dietrich Jung. Marie has been responsible for the study on Jordan, Sara for that on Egypt.

The project ran from October 2006 to October 2007 and included desk studies, interviews, an academic workshop and several meetings in Denmark, as well as field studies in Jordan and Egypt. In Denmark, we interviewed and had meetings with representatives of Danish NGOs working in either Jordan or Egypt and other resource people with substantial knowledge of civil society in either of the two countries. The field studies in Jordan and Egypt were divided into two phases: a joint exploratory trip to both countries in November-December 2006, and the actual fieldwork in March-May 2007, when Sara went to Egypt and Marie to Jordan. We both carried out interviews with representatives of civil society organisations, representatives of governmental institutions, researchers and journalists, as well as representatives of the UN and other international organisations, totalling some ninety interviews in each country. Before we go into the case studies, this first chapter will present some of the core methodological and conceptual considerations shaping our approach to the project.

### **1.3 Methodological considerations**

#### *1.3.1 Access*

While the desk studies and interviews in Denmark did not present us with any major methodological, practical or ethical obstacles, our fieldwork in Jordan and Egypt prompted a number of considerations.<sup>3</sup> Chief among them was the question of access to the organisations. Would we encounter difficulties in trying to access Muslim civil society organisations, whether as female researchers, non-natives (one of us even being a non-Arabic speaker), or as Danes, the latter in light of the recent Cartoon Crisis? These concerns proved unnecessary. In Jordan, no organisation turned down our requests for interviews, and in Egypt only two organisations did so. In our interviews, most people were open, talkative and eager to participate. Many interviewees greatly appreciated the subject and approach of our study, which they saw as an attempt to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of Muslims and their organisations. When they heard that we were from Denmark, some asked if the Cartoon Crisis was a motivation for our study. We responded that the Crisis had definitely contributed to our interest, but that our study was not a direct consequence of it. The fact that a few people mentioned the Crisis did not prevent friendly conversations – most people merely gave their opinion on the matter.<sup>4</sup> One of the few exceptions was a

<sup>3</sup> See Schwedler (2006) and Carapico (2006) on doing fieldwork in the Middle East.

<sup>4</sup> While quite a few people were still clearly upset and some encouraged the continued boycott of Danish goods, the majority interpreted the incident as a reminder of the necessity of dialogue and cultural understanding.

board member of one of the Egyptian youth organisations, who insisted that Sara accounted for her personal stance before agreeing to participate in the interview.

Likewise, being young female researchers did not present us with any major obstacles in terms of access. On the contrary, we sometimes had the feeling that – when taking the necessary precautions – this fact might even have facilitated a more relaxed atmosphere, since we were felt to be more harmless and less threatening than, e.g., an older, higher-ranking man would have been. Precautions included an awareness of gender practices such as hand-shaking, gender segregation etc. In Jordan, most of the men we interviewed preferred not to shake hands with us, and some also declined to be interviewed on their own. One avoided eye contact, though for the majority this did not seem to be common practice. Nowhere were we requested to use a headscarf. In Egypt, most men were prepared to shake hands and to be interviewed on their own. On two occasions, the representatives of particular organisations suggested that Sara should wear a headscarf when participating in and observing their activities. However, this was not presented as a requirement but was intended to allow her to blend into the crowd and thus feel more comfortable.

In both Jordan and Egypt, we made use of assistants, all of whom were young university students or recent graduates who helped us in the planning and organisation of meetings, interpretation and translation when needed, as well as other practical issues. The personal qualities, skills and backgrounds of these assistants may in many ways have facilitated our access to the organisations. In Egypt, for instance, the assistant had previously worked for Mona Atia, a North American Fulbright scholar in her studies on financial aspects of Muslim social welfare organisations, meaning that he had solid knowledge of the subject. Furthermore, he was a highly skilled interviewer and was in many cases capable of carrying out interviews on his own. Similarly, one of the Jordanian assistants was the daughter of a well-known Islamic scholar who is highly respected by both conservative and liberal Muslims in Jordan. This popularity reflected back on his daughter, whose family name prompted approving nods almost whenever she was mentioned. Adding to this, she had organisational talent and a winning personality.

In some instances, however, the use of assistants complicated rather than facilitated matters. For practical reasons, Marie had to use several different assistants, not all of whom were equally capable or experienced. For instance, during interviews one assistant would sometimes offer her own opinion on the topic being discussed or simply state that what was being said was not correct. This hints at another prob-

lem, with possibly deeper implications, namely language barriers. In Jordan, this was relatively speaking a more serious obstacle than in Egypt, since Marie does not speak Arabic and the proportion of non-English-speaking people was higher than in Egypt, where the majority were both willing and able to speak English and where Sara as an Arabic speaker could understand those who did not speak English. In Jordan, approximately two thirds of all interviews were held in Arabic/English with interpretation being provided by an assistant, whereas in Egypt more than two thirds were held in English. While in most instances the use of interpreters and translators functioned smoothly, there is no doubt that this approach inevitably leads to the loss of many nuances and details.

### *1.3.2 Methods*

We sketched the overall design and structure of the project based on interviews and a workshop with resource persons in Denmark, as well as desk studies of the two countries. During our first trip to Jordan and Egypt, we interviewed a number of resource persons from research institutions, universities, newspapers and international organisations with the purpose of confronting them with our initial ideas and received expert feedback on these. We completed the project design taking these comments and suggestions into consideration, including the specifications for our study (namely social welfare organisations in Jordan and new youth organisations in Egypt), as well as the elaboration of a strategy for our fieldwork and an interview guide.<sup>5</sup>

In each country, our first task was the selection of the sample of organisations included in our study. Through a combination of our assistants' knowledge of the field, recommendations from other researchers and our own knowledge acquired from literature and internet searches, together with a certain snowball effect, we were able to compile extensive lists of organisations potentially relevant for the purpose of our study. Looking at variables such as size, forms of activities and membership, and aiming at a broad variety, we then selected a number of different organisations for our interviews.

Our fieldwork was divided into three parts: i) interviews with representatives from a number of civil society organisations, as well as with the representatives of state institutions, universities, newspapers and international organisations; ii) participant observation in the organisations; and finally iii) the collection of written material.

<sup>5</sup> See Annex A for a copy of the original interview guide.

Our interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions, thus allowing for a high degree of informality and flexibility while maintaining a focus on the topic of our study. Most often, the interviews took place on the premises of the organisation itself, while in a few instances, but more often in Egypt than in Jordan, this was not possible and we met the interviewees in a café, in their homes or, in a few cases, where we ourselves were staying. In Egypt, most of the interviews were recorded by dictaphone, but in Jordan, many people preferred not to be recorded. In both cases, we took notes while interviewing, which nobody objected to.

The majority of interviewees from the organisations were from the top management, including presidents, board members and directors, of whom the majority would be men. When contacting the organisations to arrange for meetings, people would often assume that we preferred to speak with the leadership rather than the regular staff, volunteers or ordinary members. Therefore, we had to make a conscious effort to include these groups in our study in order to ensure variation – not only in relation to the kinds of participants who were included, but also in relation to gender. In the end, the Jordanian sample comprised around 50 percent men and the top management approximately 64 percent.<sup>6</sup> In Egypt, some 61 percent of the interviewees were men and approximately 56 percent from the top management.<sup>7</sup>

While we therefore managed to obtain an acceptable balance as regards gender and top versus middle and bottom levels of the organisations, our data clearly lack interviews with the beneficiaries of the organisations, such as single mothers, orphans, the unemployed, students and the sick. When asked, some activists were more than willing to facilitate interviews with their beneficiaries. However, these interviews often took the form of awkward ten-minute encounters with eight-year old children very scared at having to answer strange questions from an even stranger woman, and with the director staring angrily at them from his chair in the corner. Attempts to interview women participating in a vocational training course were also unsuccessful, as the women were shy and clearly uncomfortable with the set-up. In order to be successful, interviews with this group of people require substantial groundwork and preparation, including a high level of skills in Arabic. Furthermore, the interviews should be conducted outside the facilities of the organisation in order to build up the necessary trust between interviewer and interviewee.

<sup>6</sup> This figure includes interviews with representatives of the social welfare organisations. It does not include interviews with resource persons and representatives of other organisations and institutions.

<sup>7</sup> This number includes interviews with representatives of youth organisations as well as a number of traditional Muslim social welfare organisations.

A different way of obtaining information about beneficiaries is through participant observation in the organisations' activities. We participated in such activities in both Jordan and Egypt, including the distribution of food packages, the celebration of religious holidays, clothes exhibitions, human development courses, courses in basket-making, health information courses and education. Due to time constraints, however, we were forced to prioritise our efforts and were not able to spend as much time in these forms of participant observation as would have been desirable. Since the purpose of our study was to provide a general picture of a large group of organisations, we chose to prioritise interviews with as many organisations as possible, rather than reducing the number, thus leaving more time for participant observation. This decision means that, while it includes some observations on organisational practices, our study of civil society organisations and the role of Islam in these should be considered primarily an analysis of organisational discourses rather than practices. Furthermore, this means that the descriptions we present in our report are not necessarily descriptions of the organisations as they are but of their self-representations.

### *1.3.3 Ethical considerations*

Apart from the methodological and practical considerations outlined above, we encountered a number of more ethical concerns during our fieldwork. A main concern has been one of ensuring that our research would not end up as yet another example of research conducted on people from the third world, but benefiting solely people from the first world. As the director of a Jordanian organisation said, every week he would welcome a new researcher and every week they would promise to send him their reports, but so far he had not received a single report. In order to avoid this kind of one-way research, we intend to have our report translated into Arabic and distributed to all the participants in the study.<sup>8</sup>

Another concern related to anonymity. In the case of Jordan, all interviewees were asked whether they preferred anonymity, which only two did. In the case of Egypt, the majority also agreed to full disclosure. Despite this, we have decided to anonymise participants in our study, primarily due to security concerns. In both Jordan and Egypt, state control and surveillance of civil society organisations is common, and it can be difficult to judge which statements might prove to be a cause of concern for state representatives.

<sup>8</sup> An ideal process would have allowed time for feedback from participants; however, this proved impossible for practical reasons.

## 1.4 Our approach

### *1.4.1 Muslim civil society activism: different approaches*

Recent years have seen an increased interest in Middle Eastern civil societies,<sup>9</sup> paralleling the growth in organisations such as human rights movements, women's organisations and development NGOs everywhere in the region. Most analyses have focused primarily on the importance of these new civil society organisations in the promotion of democracy, interpreting their growth as a sign of democratic empowerment and participation (Hawthorne 2004:3). Among policy-makers, this argument is reflected in the focus on strengthening precisely these new actors through development and democracy assistance programmes in the Middle East. However, there are several problems with this approach. First, the relationship between civil society and democracy is not one of straight forward causality.<sup>10</sup> Secondly, human rights movements, women's organisations and development NGOs are not the only relevant actors in Middle Eastern civil societies. In fact, they might not even be the most relevant ones. In recent years, other new actors, such as Muslim organisations and movements, have come to play an increasingly visible role in discourses, symbols and social practices in Muslim societies, and it could be argued that they belong to the most vibrant parts of civil societies in the Muslim world today. Unfortunately, social scientists and practitioners often tend to disregard precisely these actors because of an intrinsic secularist bias in their concepts of civil society.<sup>11</sup>

The few analyses of Muslim civil society actors that do exist present a number of problems. As Wiktorowicz notes, in many studies the religious dimension has been seen as the primary explanatory variable for these actors, and as such has been highlighted at the expense of other, perhaps equally or more important dimensions. While religion is in many instances an important and determining factor in Muslim collective action, it is not always the only or the most important factor. The focus on religion runs the risk of reinforcing exceptionalist views of Muslim civil society organisations as something basically and fundamentally different than other kinds of civil society organisations – which is not necessarily the case. As Singerman points

<sup>9</sup> See Norton (1995), Kandil (1995), al-Sayyid (1993), Ismael (2001) and Sajoo (2002) for general discussions on civil society in the Middle East, Ibrahim (1993), Zaki (1995) and AbdelRahman (2004) on civil society in an Egyptian context; and Wiktorowicz (2000), Brand (1995), Talal (2004) and Antoun (2000) on Jordan. Also, Ben Néfissa, al-Fattah, Hanafi and Milani (2005), Gubser (2002) on NGOs in the Arab world, Anheier and Salamon (1998) on civil society in the developing world, Benthall and Bellion on Muslim NGOs (2003).

<sup>10</sup> See e.g. Özdalga and Persson (1997) for discussions of civil society and democracy in the Muslim world.

<sup>11</sup> The term "secularist" refers to the assertion that certain practices and/or institutions should exist separately from and independently of religion.



out: “The organisational structures, repertoires of contention, collective identity, and so forth of Islamic movements are similar to those of other movements throughout the world” (in Wiktorowicz 2004:143). A predefined focus on Islam may run the risk of overlooking other, equally or even more important dimensions of these organisations. Likewise, it may prevent the discovery of important religious elements in organisations that are traditionally not seen as religious. In other words, religion may be important or it may not – and, if it is important, it may be so in a number of very different ways.

Furthermore, many studies of Muslim activism and civil society organisations have been based on socio-psychological approaches, understanding these collective actions as mechanisms for alleviating psychological discomfort derived from structural strains (Wiktorowicz 2004:6).<sup>12</sup> In other words, people participate in Muslim organisations because they are poor and unemployed, because they have no opportunities for political participation or because they are frustrated at being excluded from Western modernity. Common to these studies is the understanding of an inexorable link between structural strains and collective contention – but this thesis is not empirically grounded. Structural strains and discontent are found in all societies, but they do not always result in collective action: “In reality, social movements do not correspond to the strain-movement paired logic” (Wiktorowicz 2004:9). Also, these approaches are marked by a disregard of the purposive, political and organised dimensions of movements and by a view of participants as somehow dysfunctional individuals seeking psychological comfort, as Wiktorowicz puts it. In other words, Muslim collective action is seen primarily as a compensatory reaction to structural changes rather than a potential force for change in itself.

#### *1.4.2 A model for analysis*

In light of the above, we conclude that a model for the analysis of Muslim civil society actors should be based on the following two assumptions. First, it should not frame Islam or any other single variable as the determining factor. The analysis should be open to the potential importance of a number of different variables

<sup>12</sup> As noted by Wiktorowicz, for many scholars, the underlying impetus for activism derives from the structural crises produced by the failure of secular modernisation projects (e.g. Waltz 1986; Dekmejian 1995; Hoffman 1995; Faksh 1997). Some focus on socio-economic factors as the main reason for Islamic activism, for instance, seeing young men’s fascination and joining of militant Islamic groups as a response to their social and economic immobility, which itself has led to their social alienation and anomie. Others see Islamic activism as a response to cultural imperialism and the growing influence of Western culture. Finally, some see political strains such as a lack of formal political access as the main cause of Islamic activism.

when studying civil society actors (Muslim as well as non-Muslim) while, at the same time, taking into account the possible relevance of Islam. Secondly, the explanatory frameworks should be open to other levels of analysis than the socio-economic, including in particular the motivational dimensions of the individual actors themselves.

Instead of focusing on Muslim civil society organisations, based on a predetermined assumption of the relevance of religion, we propose to focus more broadly on civil society organisations and the role that Islam might play in these. In rejecting any predetermined role of Islam, the analysis is open to the possible importance and influence of Islam to a variety of aspects, forcing us to investigate all dimensions of the organisations, and examining how and in what ways Islam might influence them. A model for the analysis of these actors should not be essentially different from a model for the analysis of other civil society actors. In both cases, there is a need for a multi-dimensional approach, guaranteeing a nuanced understanding of these organisations. Borrowing elements from social movement theories such as frame analysis, resource mobilisation theory and organisation theory, as well as new social movement theory, we propose an analytical framework that includes questions of *why* they work, *how* they work, *where*, *when* and *with whom* they work – and with religion as a cross-cutting concern.<sup>13</sup>

### *Model for analysis*

<b>Who are they?</b> Participants Members Target groups Beneficiaries	<b>Where and when do they work?</b> Context History	<b>Why do they work?</b> Vision Goals Motivation	<b>How do they work?</b> Activities Strategies Structures Financing	<b>With whom do they work?</b> Relations Alliances Conflicts
<b>What is the role of Islam?</b>				

<sup>13</sup> Traditionally, social movement theory and the study of religious organisations and movements have been considered two separate fields of study, and few attempts have been made to integrate the two, although there are obvious overlaps and resemblances in the two approaches. Hannigan (1993) was one of the first to point out this weakness, followed later by others. See e.g. Smith (1996) and Wiktorowicz (2004).

We will apply the above model in the following analysis of Muslim civil society organisations. In Jordan, the analysis will turn primarily on what can be called social welfare organisations, which constitute the largest sector in Jordanian civil society. In Egypt, the focus will be on the new youth organisations, an emerging phenomenon not only in Egypt, but in a number of other Middle Eastern countries as well. Through empirical, micro-level studies, we will provide detailed descriptions of various aspects of the discourses and practices of the organisations, paying particular attention to the role of Islam in them.<sup>14</sup>

In our study of these organisations, we originally intended to categorise them on the basis of three categories, namely i) “Islamic”, understood as organisations in which Islam played a role on an institutional level, e.g. in the form of religious activities or a formal connection to a mosque; ii) “Muslim”, referring to organisations displaying a less institutional religiosity, showing primarily at the level of the individual participants; and iii) finally “secular” referring to those organisations in which religion did not seem to play a role at all. In other words, “Islamic” would denote organisations in which Islam appeared to play a very significant role and “secular” the ones in which it appeared to play no role – with “Muslim” somewhere in-between.

However, during our fieldwork this categorisation encountered a number of obstacles. First of all, on a practical level the use of the term “Islamic” proved to be somewhat problematic since the term seems to have lost its neutrality. Thus, many people did not feel comfortable using the term, since they associated it with a political and perhaps even militant kind of Islam. For others, the term denoted a more intense or deep-felt religiosity than the term “Muslim”, and they preferred this to the latter.

Secondly, the distinction between Muslim and Islamic proved to be rather irrelevant as a way of describing the role and importance of Islam. In organisations that we would have termed Islamic, participants sometimes seemed less concerned with religion than participants in organisations we would have termed Muslim. Thus, it seems that religion does not necessarily play a bigger or more important role in organisations that are institutionally religious than in organisations that display religiosity only at the level of participants.

<sup>14</sup> This should not be interpreted as an attempt to measure which organisations are the most and least religious. The present analysis rests on an understanding of religiosity as a quality that cannot be compared in simple terms, meaning that it does not make sense to attempt to characterise people or organisations in terms of their being more or less religious than others. In other words, it is not possible to determine how religious an organisation is, but merely in what ways it is religious.

Thirdly, we had to question the distinction between on the one hand “Islamic” and “Muslim”, i.e. religious, organisations and on the other “secular” organisations. The boundaries between secular and religious are not always clear-cut and static but most often blurred and dynamic, at least in the Jordanian and Egyptian contexts. For instance, organisations we would otherwise characterise as secular – and which would characterise themselves as secular – would often use a religious language in order to improve communication with the beneficiaries of their work. Thus, instead of being mutually exclusive and sharply defined categories, these distinctions represent two poles on a continuum on which organisations over time may move back and forth.

As a way of accommodating these obstacles, in the following we refrain from distinguishing between Muslim and Islamic, using instead Muslim as a common denominator. Likewise, we do not distinguish sharply between secular and religious but use the broader and more flexible categories of “religiously-oriented” and “secularly-oriented” or simply “not religiously oriented”<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> The term “religion” refers to Islam, unless otherwise specified.

## **2. Social Welfare Organisations and Islam in Jordan**

In Jordan, social welfare organisations are among the most relevant civil society actors to look at, not only because of their number, but also because they present interesting examples of social Islam, illustrating the wide spectrum of different religious discourses and practices. Based on concrete empirical studies, this chapter offers an analysis of a number of Jordanian social welfare organisations, asking questions as to who they are, what they do, why they do it and how they relate to others, while paying particular attention to the potential influence of Islam on these different dimensions of the organisations.

Following a short description of the context surrounding the Jordanian social welfare organisations, the second section gives an overview of this sector of civil society, presenting information on the numbers and types of organisations, their participants and beneficiaries, activities and financing, as well as other aspects. Having provided an overall description of the group of social welfare organisations, the analysis then moves on to explore the role of Islam in these, focusing on some of those aspects to which the religion seems to be of particular relevance. Section three thus examines the rationale of the organisations, including the establishment of a connection between Islam and social welfare, and looks at how their understanding of social welfare and Islam influences their strategies and concrete activities. Section four focuses on the people carrying out these activities – the volunteers and employees – and discusses the different kinds of motivation underlying their engagement in social welfare activism. The fifth section discusses the relationship between the Muslim Brotherhood and certain social welfare organisations, and considers some of the consequences of this relationship. Finally, section six presents the conclusions of the analysis, summing up some of the ways in which Islam plays a role in Jordanian social welfare organisations, and briefly characterising the different kinds of Islam that have been expressed in foregoing examples.

### **2.1 Islam and civil society in Jordan**

#### ***2.1.1 Jordanian civil society: balancing on red lines***

Since its birth in 1946, Jordan has enjoyed a reputation as a comparably stable monarchy in an otherwise conflict-ridden territory, characterised by a relatively high degree of political freedom, an increasingly liberalised economy and a fairly strong civil society,

at least when compared with neighbouring countries. After more than thirty years of martial law, in 1989 the ban on political parties was lifted and elections were re-introduced by the late King Hussein, a process which led further to the growth of civil society organisations and the strengthening of a critical press. In his formulation of a number of democratic reform initiatives, known as the National Agenda, King Abdallah II has sought to continue this process of political liberalisation, and abroad in particular, the image of Jordan as a moderate and relatively democratic state is intact. However, several factors point in the opposite direction, prompting Valbjørn (2007), for example, to characterise the monarchy as a liberalising autocracy, but an autocracy nonetheless. As a constitutional monarchy, all executive authority of the country is vested in the King and a Council of Ministers, appointed by the King. The National Assembly, Jordan's parliament, is elected by popular vote but may override the veto power of the King only with a two-thirds vote, thus in practice endowing the King with near-absolute powers. Parliament is without real influence and opposition is weak. The majority of members of parliament are individuals, often representatives of tribes, and most of the country's fourteen registered political parties are weak and enjoy little popular support. Only one political party has seats in Parliament, namely the Muslim Brotherhood's political wing, the Islamic Action Front, which in the 2003 elections won 20 of the 84 seats.<sup>16</sup>

This schizophrenic character is reflected in the country's civil society. On the one hand, it is true that Jordanian civil society organisations enjoy much more freedom than those in other countries in the region and that recent years have seen a sharp increase in their growth, including also human rights organisations and organisations for the promotion of democracy. On the other hand, all actors in Jordanian civil society know that, while this freedom might be relatively great, it is still restricted by certain red lines setting out the limits of acceptable behaviour in civil society. Thus, criticism of the King and the royal family can under no circumstances be accepted, nor can the country's foreign policy and its peace treaty with Israel be questioned. Law No. 33 of 1966, which some describe as one of the oldest and most arbitrary NGO laws in the Middle East (Elbayar 2005:14), constitutes one of the most important tools of governmental control of civil society organisations. The law grants the ministries in charge wide powers to reject applications for any reason they see fit, leaving the rejected organisations with no possibility for appeal. Once established, civil society organisations are subject to constant and thorough control

<sup>16</sup> Adding to this bleak picture, rumours of torture and arbitrary imprisonment are circulating, a new terror law has been introduced basically giving the intelligence services *carte blanche*, and the new law on political parties is said actually to be weakening the opposition.

and monitoring. They can only engage in certain kinds of activities, of which they are required to maintain a detailed record, and they have to submit annual reports to the ministry in charge.<sup>17</sup> Likewise, ministerial agencies are free to send representatives to observe any meeting or election. If the ministry is dissatisfied with the activities or members of an organisation, it can dissolve it, replace individual members, or – as was recently the case with the Islamic Centre Charity Society – replace entire boards with governmentally appointed substitutes, all without judicial oversight or the possibility of appeal (Elbayar 2005:15). Often, the official reasons quoted for such reactions are technical problems, such as corruption, a lack of compliance with reporting requirements or a failure to carry out general assembly elections. When one looks more closely at the cases of dissolution or replacement, however, it seems that the reason for the regime's dissatisfaction might have more to do with the kinds of activities carried out in the organisation being deemed to be too critical of the regime, too political or otherwise crossing the red lines of acceptable behaviour. According to the regime, and as explicitly stated in the law, the purpose of civil society organisations is strictly social and cultural; no organisation is allowed to engage in "fulfilling any political objectives".<sup>18</sup>

This de-politicised understanding of civil society, a remnant of the period of martial law, is strongly reflected in the composition of Jordanian civil society today. Organisations that in other civil societies are strong political actors, such as human rights and democracy organisations, women's rights organisations, environmental organisations and other advocacy-oriented organisations, in Jordan are weak and small in number. Furthermore, while many of them may have strong connections with Western state agencies and organisations (who consider them the 'true' civil society actors), among Jordanians they are often seen as elitist and enjoy little popular support. Instead, many argue that the so-called professional associations and the student unions are the only civil society actors that actually manage to play a somewhat political role,<sup>19</sup> albeit

<sup>17</sup> Social welfare organisations and women's organisations report to the Ministry of Social Development; cultural associations to the Ministry of Culture; sports clubs and youth centres to the Ministry of Youth and Sports; and civil protection and health care societies to the Ministry of Interior. Some organisations, such as human rights and democratic development organisations, as well as environmental groups, do not report to a particular ministry.

<sup>18</sup> Law no. 33 of 1966, article 2.

<sup>19</sup> There are fourteen professional associations in Jordan, the total membership exceeding 120,000 people. The associations cater for their members' interests through, for example, the creation of pension and social security funds. These funds, together with membership fees, have accumulated large amounts of money which the associations have invested, with the result that many of them now have acquired a considerable amount of capital. Their financial independence has allowed them greater independence of the government, which has in turn facilitated an increasingly political role in relation to, e.g., the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the neo-liberal economic adjustment programme and Jordan's peace treaty with Israel (Kassim 2006: 89). See also Knowles (2000) for discussions of professional associations and democratic transformation in Jordan.

strictly monitored and limited by the state. The vast majority of organisations are not directly engaged in formal politics but prefer to focus on social and cultural issues, thereby steering clear of most clashes with the regime. Social welfare organisations engaged in activities such as education, health care, child-care, orphanages, cash and in-kind assistance and care of the elderly make up more than half of all civil society organisations, while recreational organisations, such as cultural organisations, sport organisations and scout organisations, also make up a large proportion. Furthermore, instead of applying for status as formal organisations, many civil society actors simply prefer to remain informally organised in loose networks and movements, thus by and large avoiding the control and surveillance of the regime.

*Table 1: Distribution of civil society organisations among categories<sup>20</sup>*

Category	Number	Percent
Social welfare organisations	881	50.5
Cultural associations	239	13.7
Sports, youth and scout organisations	264	15.1
Advocacy organisations (human rights, democracy, women's rights etc)	117	6.7
Research centres and think tanks	118	6.8
Professional associations, professional associations and trade unions	64	3.7
Political parties	33	1.9
International non-governmental organisations	27	1.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>1743</b>	<b>99.9</b>

### *2.1.2 Muslim actors in Jordanian civil society*

As a predominantly Muslim country, with Islam as its state religion and with a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad as its king, it comes as no surprise that Islam plays an important role in Jordanian civil society. In relation to the topic of the present analysis, it is interesting to note that this influence seems to be most obvious among the strongest civil society actors – the professional associations, the social welfare organisations and the informal networks – while the weaker ones, such as human rights organisations, women's rights organisations and

<sup>20</sup> These figures have been calculated by the author using information from the Directory of Civil Society Organisations, Al-Urdun al-Jadid, 2006.



environmental organisations, do not seem to be influenced by Islam to any larger degree. On the contrary, many of them do in fact seem to be rather secularist in their approach.<sup>21</sup>

Since the end of the 1980s, the professional associations have to an increasing degree been influenced by members of the Muslim Brotherhood, who have come to power in the majority of associations through legitimate elections (Kassim 2006:90). One member of the Agricultural Association had the following to say about their activities:

The Islamists, as they call themselves, won by election, not by force. They have made a big difference. They introduced retirement schemes, the possibility to buy land and vehicles through the association, they provide medical insurance, they help you find a job, they established a solidarity fund so if a colleague dies the family will get support. This was different before.

A similar trend is seen in the student councils. A representative of the National Forum for Youth and Culture told me that the student unions are dominated by two organisations, namely the Muslim Brotherhood and the governmental organisations or *Watan*, and that in recent years, the majority of representatives on the councils have in fact been supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood. This has prompted the government to introduce a new law in 2000, allowing the students to elect only half of the members of the student councils, while university administration selects the other half, based on academic merit. Similarly, new laws are now being discussed in attempts to restrict the power of the professional associations.

Likewise, among the informal civil society actors, it is not the nationalist or left-wing movements that dominate the picture, but rather Muslim networks such as the conservative *Salafis*. Their activities include informal interaction, lessons in private homes, seminars and conferences. Among the people I spoke to, there was disagreement as to exactly how many people are connected to this movement; but

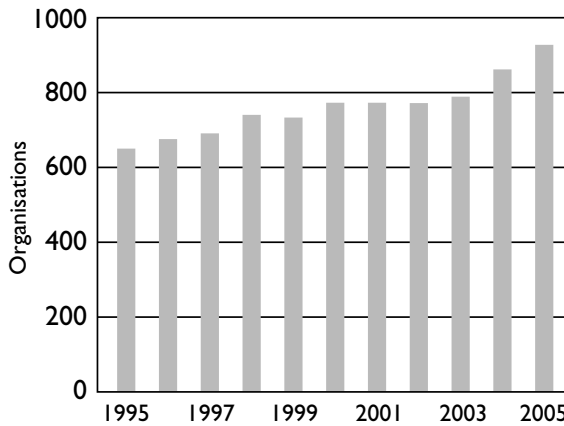
<sup>21</sup> There are no official statistics on the exact number of Muslim civil society organisations. According to Wiktorowicz (2001:84), the number of Islamic NGOs in 1995 was 49, or 6 percent of all NGOs, but it remains unclear how this number is calculated, since Wiktorowicz does not provide any definitions of the term 'Islamic'. Using information from the Civil Society Directory 2006, and defining a Muslim organisation as one with a name referring to Muslim traditions, persons or scripture, I counted the number of Muslim organisations at 142 out of 1743, or 8.1 percent of all organisations. See Annex C, Table II, for a specification according to categories. However, the question is whether such definitions cover all organisations that consider themselves Muslim?

it is clearly a significant number. Some Salafis even claim that the movement is as big as the Muslim Brotherhood (Wiktorowicz 2001:178). The movement is split in two, with a militant faction arguing for the use of violent measures and *jihad* against incumbent regimes, and a strictly apolitical and non-militant faction, to which the majority adheres. Related to this faction is the missionary network *Jamayat al-Da'wa wal Tabligh*, established in Pakistan but with representatives in Jordan as well as in other Middle Eastern countries. This movement consists of a number of individuals, often connected to mosques, who travel around the country as well as abroad, telling people about Islam with the purpose of "presenting Islam in a proper way, understanding it better", as one person expressed it.

Finally, the large group of social welfare organisations presents ample examples of the influence of Islam on civil society discourses and practices, the most obvious being the Islamic Centre Charity Society (ICCS), established by members of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1963 and today one of Jordan's largest social welfare organisations. However, whereas in the professional associations Islam is primarily a tool for political influence, and in the Salafi and Da'wa networks a missionary enterprise, as it appears in many social welfare organisations, it cannot necessarily be categorised so easily. In the following sections, I will take a closer look at this group of organisations with the purpose of examining the role and influence of Islam in them.

## **2.2 Social welfare organisations and Islam: an overview**

Social welfare organisations are some of the oldest civil society organisations in Jordan, the first one having been established in 1912. In 1931, the first specifically Muslim organisation, *Al-Maqasid al-Hijaziyya*, was established, followed the following year by another Muslim organisation, the Circassian Brotherhood. Today, social welfare organisations in Jordan make up a diverse group, including small community-based associations, organisations with branches and offices in every corner of the country, organisations run entirely by volunteers, highly professional organisations, women's associations, organisations established by ethnic groups or tribes, schools, orphanages, and organisations setting up mass weddings for poor people, distributing sacrificial lambs for *Eid al-Adha* or providing microfinance loans for women in the desert.

*Graph I: Increase in number of social welfare organisations 1995-2005<sup>22</sup>*

Overall, the organisations can be divided into six groups. The first group, including the vast majority of organisations, does not have a particular focus but is engaged in general social welfare activities. Women's associations make up a second group, including approximately 125 organisations that are run entirely by women and that direct their activities specifically at women.<sup>23</sup> Cooperatives make up the third group. The fourth group, the royal development NGOs, is a specific Jordanian phenomenon and consists of approximately five organisations established or chaired by a member of the royal family.<sup>24</sup> The royal organisations are some of the strongest social welfare organisations; they are all registered with the state as private societies and as such are not subject to the same laws as other civil society organisations. The youth organisations constitute a fifth type. Traditionally, youth organisations in Jordan have primarily been concerned with scout and sporting activities, but recently a few new youth organisations have started engaging in social welfare activities. The sixth group includes international, including Western and Arab, organisations working with social welfare in Jordan, either through direct involvement in projects and programmes of their own, or through partnerships with and sponsorship of local Jordanian organisations. Approximately thirty to fifty international organisations are present in Jordan.

<sup>22</sup> The graph is based on information provided by the General Union of Voluntary Societies, according to whom the total number of social welfare organisations in 2005 was 925, slightly higher than the number calculated when using information from the Directory of Civil Society Organisations 2006, namely 881.

<sup>23</sup> See Hammad (1999) for an account of Jordanian women's organisations.

<sup>24</sup> The group of so-called royal organisations includes not only social welfare organisations, but also cultural associations, research institutions and youth centres.

Regardless of their differences, social welfare organisations have several similarities. They are all defined as organisations which seek to provide a minimum level of income, service or other support for disadvantaged peoples such as the poor, elderly, disabled, students, unemployed, orphans, single parents or the sick.<sup>25</sup> In many organisations, there is a particular focus on women. While most organisations reach out to between 50 and 500 families, a few count their beneficiaries in several thousands, with the Islamic Centre Charity Society (hereafter ICCS) and some of the royal organisations topping the list, each reaching more than 50,000 people. According to the General Union of Voluntary Societies (GUVS), the total number of beneficiaries reached by social welfare organisations amounts to almost half a million (cf. Wiktorowicz 2001:25). Typical activities include, among others, financial and material aid, care, education, vocational training, microfinance activities and health services. Recently, less traditional activities such as lobbying, advocacy and awareness-raising campaigns have also become part of the repertoire in a few organisations, primarily the royal organisations.<sup>26</sup>

In most organisations, a small group of active members sit on the board and may, depending on its size and resources, also work as volunteers in the implementation of its activities, while larger organisations often employ professional staff to implement the activities decided on by the board (Harmsen 2007:124). According to information from GUVS, 111,000 people are members of a social welfare organisation. Some of the largest organisations are the ICCS, with more than 3,000 employees working in the organisation's health clinics, schools or more than 50 community centres, and the Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Development (JOHUD), with more than 400 employees.<sup>27</sup>

Most organisations base their income on membership fees, as well as donations from individuals and businesses within the local community.<sup>28</sup> Some receive support from the GUVS and government sources. However, whereas one government representative

<sup>25</sup> For some scholars (e.g. Clark 2004), the question has been raised whether or not some of the Muslim organisations are targeting the middle classes rather than the poor in their activities. However, while some ICCS activities certainly do so, this does not mean that there are no activities targeting the lower classes, or that the middle classes are being prioritised over the poor.

<sup>26</sup> See Annex C, Table V, for an overview of activities.

<sup>27</sup> See Annex C, Table IV, for an overview of employees, members, volunteers and beneficiaries.

<sup>28</sup> Very few organisations have the capacity to establish more formal partnerships with major market institutions. Only organisations of the size of ICCS and the royal organisations have this possibility. One example of such cooperation is the project *Zakat al-Fitr Campaign through Telephone*, established in cooperation between Tkiyet Um Ali and the telephone companies Mobilecom and Jordan Telecommunication Co., which allows donations to be made by dialling a certain telephone number.

stated that most social welfare societies receive some sort of government support, several organisations claimed that they do not receive anything from the government. On the contrary, several representatives, even of very small organisations, told me that the ministry sometimes sends them people who need help. Some organisations, primarily the royal ones as well as a few other large organisations, receive funding from international donor organisations.<sup>29</sup> However, new anti-terror laws have meant that funding from abroad has become more problematic, and many prefer not to receive anything.<sup>30</sup> As the director of one organisation said:

It's too complicated. Anyone who wants to give us money has to provide his name, address, identification number, a long list of information, and we have to send a copy of the receipt to the ministry. Even for one JD<sup>31</sup>. It's too much.

The role of religion in the social welfare organisations varies widely. A few organisations are explicitly non-religious, whereas in most organisations, religion influences the discourse and practices to a greater or lesser degree.<sup>32</sup> In some organisations, religion permeates everything that is said and done, whereas in others, it is merely something that pops up once in a while. Some organisations have a religious name, some offer religious activities such as Quran reading and the celebration of religious holidays, and some are connected to religious structures such as mosques or zakat committees. And then there are organisations in which religion may not play any immediately visible role but in which participants are all driven by a religious motivation. On the following pages, I examine these different roles of religion in more detail. While looking at various aspects of the organisations' discourses and practices, I attempt to answer questions such as: Why do the organisations engage in social welfare activities? How do they do this? Who are the people participating in these activities? What are their relationships with other actors in society? And finally, what is the role of religion in all this?

<sup>29</sup> The general sentiment towards cooperation with international organisations is open and interested. While there are still a relatively large number of the Muslim organisations that do not cooperate with any international organisations, even these emphasise their willingness to work with whomever and to learn from different people, should the opportunity arise.

<sup>30</sup> Ironically enough, while international funding may have decreased, for some organisations national and local donations have actually increased since the terror attacks and the implementation of the new laws. In the words of one employee: "As the superpower pressure increases, people's donations increase".

<sup>31</sup> One Jordanian Dinar equals approximately 1.4 US Dollars

<sup>32</sup> Reflecting the population, a number of organisations are explicitly Christian. However, since the focus in this analysis is on the role of Islam in social welfare organisations, these will not be considered here.

The analysis is based on interviews with 24 social welfare organisations. In selecting organisations, I have attempted to cover different kinds, bearing in mind the above list of organisational types, while also attempting to include those in which I expected Islam to play a certain role, whether based on their names, their reputations or their activities.<sup>33</sup> Apart from the social welfare organisations, a number of other civil society actors that are occasionally engaged in social welfare activities have also been interviewed, including representatives of informal networks of individuals and cultural organisations. Likewise, representatives of a number of governmental and semi-governmental institutions also engaged in social welfare activities have been interviewed, including the Ministry of Social Development, the National Aid Fund, the Zakat Fund (*Sandug al-Zakat*) and the local zakat committees.<sup>34</sup>

## 2.3 Islam and social welfare: Charity or development?

### 2.3.1 *Islam and social welfare: zakat, thawab and the prophet's deeds*

Engaged in social welfare activities, the organisations studied here all have a common overall goal of assisting the poor and underprivileged. Their work is therefore aimed first and foremost at solving problems of poverty and problems related to poverty such as illness, unemployment, abandoned or orphan children, etc. For most organisations, Islam plays an extremely important role as the underlying rationale for engaging in such social welfare work.<sup>35</sup> Even organisations that otherwise do not seem to be very religiously oriented, such as the Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Human Development (JOHUD), sometimes draw on a religious discourse: "Through its Goodwill Campaign, JOHUD reaches out to those in most desperate need,

<sup>33</sup> See Annex C, Table III, for an overview of which organisations are included in the analysis, as well as the category to which they belong.

<sup>34</sup> While these committees are run by volunteer citizens and as such could be considered non-governmental organisations, they are set up with the approval of, and often requested by, the governmental Zakat Fund, which then oversees all their activities, in effect making them a private branch of the state (Wiktorowicz 2001: 65). There are approximately 170 local zakat committees in the country, in total supporting approximately 13,000 families financially. Apart from this, they provide material aid such as food, sacrificial lambs and school bags, and also offer medical care to poor families, emergency cases, orphans and students (Benthall 1999: 33).

<sup>35</sup> An interesting thing to note in this respect is that, while almost everybody I talked to mentioned Islam in relation to the goals of their respective organisations, this is not reflected in their official mission or vision statements. An obvious reason for such omissions could be that, according to the law on social welfare organisations, Law No. 33, involvement in activities that can be interpreted as 'political', 'sectarian' or 'religious' is strictly forbidden. While this requirement is clearly not enforced in the majority of cases, the regime's interpretation of what constitutes illegal 'religious' or 'sectarian' activities and what constitutes legal activities remains at best unclear and arbitrary. Thus, it is not implausible that, when applying for permission to establish the organisations, the founders simply chose to downplay the role of Islam in their mission statements, thereby avoiding unnecessary questioning and suspicion in the application process.

providing immediate assistance, drawing on Islamic values of solidarity and bringing together the entire Jordanian community”.<sup>36</sup> While for JOHUD Islam is one of many reasons for carrying out social welfare activities, in many other organisations the connection between Islam and social welfare plays a much more prominent role. Reflecting a common attitude, the director of the organisation *Al-Afaf* explained the connection in this way:

In general, human kind tends to do good work, but in Islam this is highlighted: giving and doing good are just as important as praying. The word “volunteer” is mentioned in the Quran. In Islam, it is not that hard to do good work. The Prophet Muhammad says that, if you see something harmful in the street and you remove it, you have done something good, you will receive points. So charity is good, whether it is small or big. Another good example is that it is considered a good deed if you smile to your brother’s face. And this really doesn’t cost you anything. This saying has two important aspects: that it is good to do charity, and that the relation between people should be good. A peaceful, loving relationship between people is what Islam wants. This is what Islam is all about – doing good deeds.

The relationship between Islam and social welfare aid rests on a number of important concepts and traditions in Islam. Stories and sayings (or *hadiths*) of the prophet and his followers, known by all and continually repeated, contribute to the construction of this connection between Islam and social welfare activities. One popular narrative tells a story about the second caliph after Muhammad, Omar bil Khattab, who used to wander around among the poor in Mecca, carrying a sack of flour and making sure that everyone had enough to eat. Another tells how the Prophet took care of his old neighbour, even though the man had never been nice to him. Likewise, sayings such as “the one who sleeps with a full stomach while his neighbour is hungry, he is not a believer” and “the prophet said, ‘the person who takes care of an orphan will be my friend in heaven’”, were repeated over and over again by interviewees to illustrate the connection. Also, the concept of *thawab*, referring to the divine rewards given for good deeds, emphasises the importance of social welfare activities in Islam. Among the deeds recognised as triggering the most rewards are to visit the sick, to give alms and to help the poor. Furthermore, persuading others to do such good deeds also prompts rewards in the afterlife (Benthall 1999:35). Several hadiths, such as the one

<sup>36</sup> [www.johud.org.jo](http://www.johud.org.jo)

quoted below, give guidelines for how and when to do such good deeds and how many rewards they trigger:

Narrated Abu Huraira: Allah's Apostle said, 'If one gives in charity what equals one date-fruit from the honestly earned money and Allah accepts only the honestly earned money, Allah takes it in His right (hand) and then enlarges its reward for that person (who has given it), as anyone of you brings up his baby horse, so much is that it becomes as big as a mountain'.<sup>37</sup>

The concepts of *zakat* and, to a lesser degree, *sadaqa* also play an important role in people's understanding of social welfare. While *sadaqa*, literally 'to be truthful', refers to voluntary almsgiving and charity, *zakat* refers to the obligation for all Muslims to pay 2.5 percent of their wealth to the poor and needy.<sup>38</sup> *Zakat* is one of the five pillars of Islam and as such a crucial element of the Muslim faith. One person even told me that *zakat* and prayer are the two most important duties in Islam. As Benthall notes, the meaning is usually taken to be that, by giving up a portion of one's wealth, one purifies that portion which remains, and also oneself, through a restraint on one's greed and one's imperviousness to others' sufferings. Likewise, the recipient is purified from jealousy and hatred of the rich (Benthall 1999:29). Thus, *zakat* is good for both the giver and the receiver and, by extension, for society, as one person pointed out to me: "When the rich people give, they feel better because they help people. And when the poor get money they will not hate the rich. This will contribute to the creation of a more secure community; there will be no hatred between the classes".

One verse in the Quran specifies the permitted beneficiaries of *zakat*:

Alms are for the poor and the needy, and those employed to administer the (funds); for those whose hearts have been (recently) reconciled (to Truth); for those in bondage and in debt; in the cause of Allah and for the wayfarer: (thus is it) ordained by Allah, and Allah is full of knowledge and wisdom.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Sahih Bukhari, Book 2, no. 491.

<sup>38</sup> The guidelines for the payment of *zakat* are not described in the Quran but in the *sunna*. Traditionally, the required annual amount was 1/40 of one's wealth, but over the years the scholarly literature has set out more specific rules. For instance, people whose wealth is below a certain threshold are not required to pay *zakat* (Benthall 1999: 29).

<sup>39</sup> Translation by Yusuf Ali.



Naturally, this verse has given rise to a number of discussions as to concrete interpretations: who is to be included in the different categories? Most importantly, do the categories include non-Muslims or only Muslims?<sup>40</sup> The majority of organisations make a strong point of emphasizing that they include Muslims as well as non-Muslims in their work. As one person said: “We are not racists and we do not care about what religious belief people have. We have no intention of helping only Muslims”. Some even showed me photographs and identity papers of Christians receiving financial aid in order to prove their point. A representative from the International Islamic Charity Organisation was the only organisation with a slightly different opinion on the topic: “The money goes primarily to Muslims. We prefer to give to Muslims first, but if there are other people in need, we help them too – even the Jews! For example, in Africa, we help Christian people. But Muslims first.” However, many scholars are of the opinion that, despite saying the opposite, some organisations do in fact limit their assistance to beneficiaries who show clear signs of being a Muslim. One researcher, Bakr M. al-Hiyari of the Royal Institute for Interfaith Studies, said to me: “I know of places in Amman where people would only get assistance if they wear the *hijab* or go to an Islamic school”. Likewise, Benthall notes among both Christian and Muslim organisations “a reluctance to give the same degree of assistance to non-co-religionists as to co-religionists and prospective converts” (Benthall and Bellion 2003:155). One staff member of one of the organisations, whose director had actually emphasised the non-discriminatory approach of the organisation, supported this observation: “The director doesn’t want to give money to people who don’t wear the hijab, so they all do”, he told me.

### *2.3.2 Solutions to poverty: charity and development*

As can be inferred from the above, for most organisations Islam is the underlying *raison d’être*, in other words, Islam is the reason *why* these organisations attempt to solve problems of poverty. In the following section, I will consider more closely *how* the organisations attempt to tackle poverty.

Overall, the strategies used by most of the organisations studied can be described as implementation-oriented rather than advocacy-oriented. Apart from some of the royal organisations, no one engages in activities to try and change the underlying structures in society. No one lobbies for reform of the social welfare system or a new

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<sup>40</sup> Theological arguments for targeting only Muslims include, e.g., those of the Egyptian scholar ‘Uthman Hussain Abd-Allah. On the other hand, Al-Khayyat, a Jordanian Islamic scholar, argues that the term *al-fuqarā* must mean ‘all the poor’, and as such should include non-Muslim poor people as well (Benthall 1999: 31).

tax system or tries to influence political decisions in any other way – or at least, they do not do so openly. Instead, they focus on solving problems of poverty at the level of individuals. Since I did not inquire about this choice of strategy in the organisations I visited, it is difficult to say anything definite about the underlying reasons for this. However, one obvious explanation might be the fear of social welfare organisations in engaging in what might be interpreted as political activities, thus crossing the red lines delimiting acceptable behaviour in civil society. The fact that the royal organisations are the only ones to engage openly in advocacy is a clear indication of the much larger room for manoeuvre they are given, due to their close connections to the royal family. As a representative of one of these organisations said: “We are respected by donors and by the government, even though we are highly critical”.

More specifically, the organisations’ different approaches to solving problems of poverty can roughly be divided into two kinds, namely a so-called charity approach and a more development-oriented approach. Whereas the charity-oriented approach refers to traditional and often short-term almsgiving and service provision in the form of material or financial aid, health services and caring, social development refers to the longer term achievement of social and economic rights and self-sustainability, emphasising participation and empowerment in the process of getting there. In the group of organisations studied here, the so-called royal development organisations all display clear examples of a discourse similar to that found in many Western development NGOs. For instance, the mission statement of the Jordan River Foundation reflects typical development jargon: “Our Mission: The Jordan River Foundation’s mission is to promote, in partnership with stakeholders, the development of a dynamic Jordanian society by initiating and supporting sustainable social, economic and cultural programs that empower communities and individuals based on their needs and priorities”.<sup>41</sup> Likewise, other royal organisations such as the Young Muslim Women’s Association, *Tkiyet Um Ali* and JOHUD use a secular development discourse. Often, they also have a strong human rights focus, like JOHUD, which on its website states that “Everyone is born with fundamental human rights. JOHUD strives to ensure that these rights are recognised, respected and upheld at all times”.<sup>42</sup>

Most researchers assume that more religiously oriented organisations have a very traditional charity approach to their work, and they are very critical of this. Asef Bayat, for instance, argues that “[t]he identity of Islamism has never articulated a vision

<sup>41</sup> Jordan River Foundation, [www.jordanriver.jo](http://www.jordanriver.jo)

<sup>42</sup> JOHUD, [www.johud.org.jo](http://www.johud.org.jo)

of an alternative urban order around which to mobilise the community members, whom the Islamists see as deserving welfare recipients, to be guided by leaders. The members are rarely expected to participate actively in making their communities" (Bayat 2002:13). Likewise, while appreciating the efficiency and effectiveness of the Muslim organisations, representatives of the royal social welfare organisations characterise their work as purely charitable – as one person said to me, "It doesn't really change things". Representatives of the youth organisations agree with this assessment. One young woman put it like this: "They are supposed to help people develop and take control of their own life, not just give them money. They could help a woman start a business or give her a small loan. But they don't. Instead, they make people dependant on the money".

My interviews with and visits to a number of organisations only partially confirmed these views. Some organisations, especially the smaller ones, do seem to adopt a rather charity-oriented approach. Their activities focus primarily on the provision of financial aid and material goods such as blankets, food packages and sheep to be sacrificed at Eid al-Adha. Support is often given in a random, unsystematic and short-sighted manner, primarily due to a lack of donations or human resources. While these organisations are definitely concerned about and care for the people they seek to help, the goal is to provide immediate relief, not to assist them in breaking out of their circles of poverty or by creating a more sustainable situation for themselves. However, many organisations actually seem to have a more development-oriented approach. In particular, one community centre under the ICCS displayed a very well-articulated understanding of development. According to the director of the centre, this is the result of almost ten years of cooperation with UNICEF.<sup>43</sup> Telling me about this cooperation, he said:

We had to rethink the way we help others. It's about collaboration between people; it's about interaction with society, with government institutions. We participated in a number of training courses – training in early childhood development, youth programmes, everyday life skills, empowerment of women. [...] We started to work with the local community, we had representatives going to different areas and talking to people about their needs in relation to infrastructure, education, health and so on.

<sup>43</sup> Likewise, the UNICEF employee responsible for the partnership was also extremely positive about the cooperation and the results obtained: "They were charity-oriented in the beginning, when we started cooperating with them, but now they have added the development component, and it was very easy to convince them of the benefits of this approach. They just needed someone to put them on the right track".

Their approach turned out to be so successful that the centre received an award from the ICCS headquarters for being the best of the organisation's 55 centres. With pride in his voice, the director told me that his centre has become an ideal for other centres in the ICCS to follow because of this development approach. The idea is to implement a similar approach in 25 percent of all ICCS centres within the next two years. But even now, other ICCS centres also seem to be very aware of concepts such as empowerment, self-sustainability and participation. The director of another centre told me that their work is not only about handing out money, but about changing the situation of the poor: "In the beginning, the poor and the widows would just come here for money. We tried to convince them to work, to change their lives. And I can see how they have changed. They have better morals, their aims in life have changed. The women now guide their children to education".

Rather than reflecting a sharp divide between charity and development, most organisations do in fact engage in both kinds of activity. One example is the youth organisation *Suna'a al-Hayah*, which seems to be very much aware of the problems with purely charitable activities. As one of its members put it: "Poverty will not be solved by giving out 3,000 bags". The organisation is currently preparing the launch of an income-generating project offering financial and technical support to people who have a project they wish to implement. At the same time, members spend a lot of energy and manpower on the organisation of *iftar* and the distribution of food bags during Ramadan. The International Islamic Charitable Organisation is another example. Their activities include income-generating projects, education and training, as well as building mosques, the distribution of sheep for sacrifice during Eid al-Adha and food distribution during Ramadan. In terms of concrete spending, however, development activities still seem to play a minor role compared to more traditional charity activities. In ICCS, for instance, in the period 2002-2006, only a little more than five percent of all funds was spent on development-oriented projects and activities such as the Productive Families Project and the Training and Rehabilitation Project. Likewise, having told me about development-oriented activities such as training and awareness-raising in women's rights and children's rights, one employee at one of the ICCS community centres also emphasised that "these activities are just supporting activities to our main activities, which are to help orphans and their families financially".

While many elements in the organisations' understanding of development are identical or similar to those of Western development NGOs, the redirection of their work cannot be seen as a simple rejection of traditional religious charity in favour of a secular

Western development approach. For many, their development approach is merged with a strong focus on Islam, as expressed on the website of *Al-Farouq*:

Our message: presenting free services and developmental as well as social solutions with the least cost possible; planting the experience in the local community using all scientific methods and creative ideas in order to meet our service recipients' expectations – supported with local and international partnerships in accordance with our lenient Islamic constitution.<sup>44</sup>

This coupling of Islam and development is reflected very concretely in many activities of the organisations. For instance, some use the Quran to facilitate the introduction of concepts such as children's rights. One employee in the Jordan River Foundation mentioned that, in their education on child safety, they use verses from the Quran to illustrate their points. Likewise, in one ICCS centre, staff have initiated cooperation with the local imams, training them in issues such as women's and children's rights, in the hope that they will then pass on the message to the men in the area. One employee told me about this process:

Of course, we met a lot of criticism for our work. There were so many difficulties with the men. [...] Some imams rejected the idea until we gave an example from the Quran – the Prophet Muhammad actually played with his children. There was one imam, he used to hit his children and never play with them, but then he heard this story and participated in our course and he actually apologised to his child.

The concept of zakat also plays an important role in the formulation of this specifically Muslim approach to development. As a representative of the ICCS put it: "If the proper Islamic approach was applied, there would be no poverty. In Jordan, for example, there are about 40 billion JD in frozen assets in the banks. If everyone paid zakat of this amount, it would equal 350 million JD. This would be enough to fight poverty and unemployment". As it is today, zakat is often distributed as alms in an unsystematic, random manner, detaining people in situations of dependence rather than empowering them. However, many of the people I talked to see zakat as having the potential to be something more and something else than merely a patronising system for almsgiving from rich individuals to poor individuals, often emphasising a rights-based understanding of the concept: "God orders people to take from the rich

<sup>44</sup> [www.alfarouqsociety.org](http://www.alfarouqsociety.org)

and give to the poor. This is a basic thing in Islam. God also said that it is the right of the poor to receive this money”, one person told me. Several people suggested that zakat be given solely through income-generating projects. Others thought that zakat should simply be collected and distributed among the poor once in the lifetime of a person, and this one time should cover all the person’s needs. Some, echoing Prince Hassan’s suggestion back in 1999, proposed the establishment of an international system for the collection of zakat. Regardless of how, there seems to be wide agreement on the need to reform the current zakat system, thus ensuring a more systematic, effective and development-oriented approach.<sup>45</sup>

While claiming that development approaches to poverty are inherent in Islam, no one rejected the influence of Western thought on these approaches: “We take Islamic studies and combine them with Western thoughts on development. We benefit from the Western development approach – but we only take the good things”, one person said. When describing their understanding of development, some also mentioned the caliph Omar bil Khattab, who, during his reign from 634 to 644, established a system of birth control, originally imported from Iran. This story is told as an example of how different systems can merge, and by extension as a legitimisation of the use of so-called Western approaches to development.

Thus, in many organisations, Islam and development are not seen as two mutually exclusive categories; instead, true social development stems from Islam and as such is an inherent part of Islam. But how does this approach play out in practice? In the following section, I will present examples of different activities in selected social welfare organisations, reflecting important aspects of development, such as self-sustainability, empowerment and participation, with the purpose of illustrating this apparent combination of Islam and development.

### *2.3.3 Micro-finance, women’s rights and participatory education*

#### *Self-sustainability through income-generating activities*

Most social welfare organisations are engaged in the distribution of financial aid. Changes in the ways this assistance is given illustrate very concretely a shift towards

<sup>45</sup> However, the current zakat system might in itself also provide obstacles to the introduction of a more development-oriented approach. Many people who give donations to the organisations condition their aid, and most prefer to give to specific cases such as an orphaned child or a bright student rather than abstract development projects. Nonetheless, through seminars, meetings and visits to projects for potential donors, one ICCS centre actually managed to change this practice, convincing local donors to provide support for development projects instead.

a more development-oriented approach aimed at long-term self-sustainability rather than immediate relief. Traditionally, financial aid has been given as monthly allowances to poor families. The amounts provided by many social welfare organisations are most often too low to make any real difference to the people receiving the assistance.<sup>46</sup> The director of one ICCS centre told me that the amount provided per family had recently been increased from 25 to 30 JD, but, as he rightly said, “even that is still too little”.

Frustrated by the lack of sustainable results from the distribution of financial aid, many organisations have started showing a growing interest in microfinance activities, income-generating projects and vocational training. One of the first Jordanian organisations to engage in such activities, the royal development organisation JOHUD, initiated their income-generating projects back in the 1970s. Today, almost half of the organisations included in this study now engage in such activities. The director quoted above explained the reason for this shift to me: “If you give people money every day, the poverty will never end. There are more and more poor people. So we will start with these productive projects, and this way families might be able to manage on their own, and in the future they will be able to support us so we can help other families”. The ICCS community centres, Suna’a al-Hayah, the International Islamic Charitable Organisation, Al-Farouq and others all engage in income-generating projects. A representative of the International Islamic Charitable Organisation told me that, so far, they have provided loans to approximately 600 families with a return rate of more than 96 percent. Likewise, several hundred women participate in Al-Farouq’s vocational training programmes, which include activities such as honey production, handicraft courses and agricultural training. The organisation has rented some land on which the women plant their vegetables. 75 percent of the profits go to the women, the association receiving 25 percent. In the majority of organisations, however, these activities are carried out on a much smaller scale. One women’s organisation, *That al-Netaqueen*, has hired eight poor women to work in the kitchen, where they learn cooking skills, hygiene and basic accounting. Their food is then sold to people in the neighbourhood. In *Khawla bint al-Azwar*, another women’s organisation, twenty women receive training in sewing, cooking and beauty issues.

Many people refer to a story about the Prophet Muhammad in justifying this change: “The prophet Muhammad was once asked by a little boy to give him money. He

<sup>46</sup> This is also true of government aid. According to a brochure from the fund, four million JD has been distributed to 13,000 families, equalling approx. 25 JD per family per month.

gave him an axe and told him to go and cut wood instead. This is our approach”, a representative from the ICCS headquarters told me. I heard the story several times, always as a way of illustrating the connection between Islam and social development approaches, thus legitimising the introduction of activities such as micro-finance loans and income-generating projects.

*Women's role in the organisations: gender equality and empowerment*

Another interesting aspect to consider when discussing the organisations' understanding of development is gender equality and the role of women, as regards both participants and beneficiaries. Many assume that all Muslim organisations have a very traditional approach to these issues. As Bakr M. al-Hiyari of the Royal Institute for Interfaith Studies said to me: “As regards women's position, I don't see them as being able to empower women. They probably prefer the women to stay at home, take care of the children and support the family. But this is my opinion”. Many organisations are very aware of such prejudices and stereotypes. Before one interview, the director of a women's association said to me, slightly annoyed: “I assume that you are going to ask about women and Islam, you always ask about that, you all assume that [Muslim] women are so oppressed”. And many, both men and women, were very eager to challenge these prejudices and stereotypes, explaining to me how Islam is in fact empowering women, not oppressing them, and how women's rights are an inherent part of Islam. One man formulated it this way:

Islam gave women all the rights, she is equal to men. Before Islam, women did not inherit anything; in Islam she does. Islam also asks people to treat women right. The prophet said this. He also said, be gentle with glass – that is, women – they are fragile. Don't hate women. Before Islam, many people killed their baby girls.

However, practices in many organisations present serious limitations on the highly appraised rights and empowerment of women. For instance, while continuously emphasising the rights of women, the director of the women's association mentioned above also said that women's participation as volunteers in the association ought to depend on the support of the husbands, thus demonstrating a rather conservative attitude. Also, many of the activities that are offered support rather than challenge traditional gender roles. Vocational courses focus on flower arrangements, basket-making and cooking, and classes and lectures offer topics such as motherhood, good kitchen hygiene and marriage. As a director of one women's association explained: “We talk about how to have a good family, relations between husband



and wife, child-rearing and so on". Likewise, although the director of a cooperative told me that Islam encourages women to participate in society, only four out of 35 employees in the cooperative are women. Furthermore, and on a more general note, very few board members are women; almost no directors are women; and many organisations have an, if not formal, then informal policy of only hiring women who wear headscarves.

That said, quite a few organisations did seem to present a less restricted understanding of women's rights and empowerment, even managing actually to integrate their discourse into practice. One example is *Al-Aqsa*, established by a famous women's rights activist and co-founder of the moderate Muslim Centre Party (*Hizb al-Wasat al-Islami*). In a speech on women's rights and Islam to the women of Madaba at a local youth centre, she said that, for women, "knowledge can be a weapon for empowerment, a way to participate in social development". Through lectures and workshops in her organisation, she attempts to promote women's rights: "If women know their rights, we believe that they can make a change", she said to me. Likewise, Khawla bint al-Azwar offers health information courses and vocational training to prostitute women, motivated by a desire to empower them. The director told me that people often asked her why she did not just focus her efforts on getting the girls married, but no, she said, "I want these women to be able to take care of themselves". Likewise, a woman who participates in the activities of Khawla bint al-Azwar told me: "Before, I didn't know that I had any rights. My husband had another wife, and all he thought about was having sex with me. Before I came here, I was lost. I didn't know what I was capable of. Here, I learned about my rights, I learned what I was capable of, and I learned to stand up for myself". Finally, in one of the ICCS centres, female teachers and beneficiaries are engaged in projects with the purpose of empowering women. An employee told me about one of their projects:

We have this program called "The Woman Can". She can negotiate, she can speak her mind, express her feelings, she should not fear anything, she can do what the man can do. We teach them this. The teachers didn't know about this in the beginning. They participated in the training; now they train others. Islam says that when you do something, do it out of love, not because you have to do it.

Another teacher said that she keeps talking about women's rights and how to be active in society, because this is what Islam teaches: "It doesn't matter whether you

wear the veil or not. [...] We focus on teaching women to be active in the family and in society. Women can be role models. A woman should choose a career, she should not be dependant, she can earn money for the family”.

This focus on women’s empowerment and rights is further reflected in attitudes towards education. In fact, everybody I spoke to agreed that women and girls have a right to education and openly criticised those who do not support this right, such as the Salafis: “They might insist that their wife and daughters wear *niqab*, they sometimes don’t think the girls should go to university – although this is wrong”, the director of an ICCS centre told me. Even the director of one of the most conservative and traditional organisations said that he encouraged the girls to continue their studies and go to university. Many organisations face problems with conservative relatives when promoting girls’ right to education. A teacher in one of the ICCS centres told me that they often face problems with relatives who will not allow the girls to go to school or who only allow them to go to school until they reach a certain grade, after which they are expected to get married. “But”, the teacher said, “we support the mothers and try to convince the uncles. We tell them that you never know what will happen in the future; the girl might get divorced, and what will she then do without an education?” This way, they are able to convince 75 percent of the people.

#### *Participation and problem-solving*

A third interesting aspect to consider when discussing development-oriented approaches is participation. In the royal organisations, which strongly reflect a secular development discourse, this is a crucial element in most activities. In JOHUD, for instance, one representative presented me with the organisation’s strategy for community empowerment, which includes the establishment of committees to ensure participation and ownership of the local community. But this emphasis on participation is also found in other organisations. In particular, the new youth organisations seem to be driven by a participatory approach, emphasising discussion and problem-solving as important components internally in the organisation, as well as in their activities with beneficiaries. As a member of one of the youth organisations stated in talking about the recruitment of new members: “We like to discuss, to deal with each other, to convince each other, to share. We want people who have opinions, who know how to think, how to deal with problems”..

Likewise, the educational activities of some organisations reflect a strong focus on participation. In particular, the ICCS centres carry out education activities for chil-

dren, most often orphans or children in poor families.<sup>47</sup> Many centres offer English and computer lessons every afternoon, together with tutoring classes for those who need it. Religious activities such as reading and memorising the Quran are important elements in the education offered in many organisations. As Benthall notes, many people see such activities as encouraging passivity rather than active participation, critical problem-solving and creativity (Benthall and Bellion 2003:104).

While the educational activities in the majority of organisations definitely reflect these prejudices, a few have managed to present an apparently successful synthesis of these different kinds of learning. In one ICCS centre, for instance, a number of programmes for participation by girls have been introduced, targeting girls from six to seventeen years old, and including a total of more than 500 girls. One programme focuses on morals and ethics: “We try to teach them to know themselves, to know their families, to know about life and society, through this project”, the teacher told me. “We don’t only teach the basics of religion, we talk about protection from abuse, we talk about hygiene, and we talk about their rights – all from the point of view of religion”. Another programme aims to teach the girls to gather information, make plans and solve problems, while a third focuses on how to set goals and be ambitious, always with a strong focus on girls and women’s empowerment, as another employee told me. I participated in some of these activities, and in my field notes from that day I wrote:

In a big room in the basement, twenty young girls, perhaps seven or eight years old and most of them with colourful scarves on their head, are sitting around a table. Their teacher, a young, energetic woman, writes on the blackboard and cracks jokes that make all the kids laugh. The topic for today’s lesson is problem-solving, and the children suggest a number of problems that they find relevant to solve. One says drugs, another smoking, a third jealousy and a fourth violence against children. During the lesson, they discuss all the topics written on the blackboard and talk about how to solve them. Some of the girls have prepared short presentations for the others. They all participate actively in the class and seem to be very engaged in the discussions. In another room, a group of older girls, approx. 12 years old, are having a lesson on how to set goals and achieve them. One of the girls is eager to speak and tells me that her goal is to learn many languages and go to college.

<sup>47</sup> See Roald (1994) on education and Islamic movements.

## **2.4 Doing good for God, yourself and others**

Whereas the first section of this chapter looked at the rationale, strategies and activities of the organisations, this section turns towards those who are implementing them, considering who they are, what motivates them to become involved and what role Islam plays in this.

### ***2.4.1 Members, employees and volunteers***

Participants in the organisations can be divided into three groups: members, employees and volunteers. As has already been noted, most members are relatively inactive, possibly participating in the general assembly meetings and paying their membership fees, but apart from that not playing an active part in the organisations, for which reason they have not been included in the present analysis. Instead, the focus will be on volunteers and employees, who are the active participants in the organisations. In approximately half of the organisations studied here, the work is carried out by a group of professional employees, often supported by a number of volunteers. This is the case in the highly professional royal organisations, but also in the ICCS, where 3,400 people work as paid staff, while perhaps even more are attached to the organisation as volunteers. Some organisations are primarily run by volunteers but have hired a few paid staff to take care of administrative matters. For example, Suna'a al-Hayah has one employee and more than 700 volunteers, Al-Afaf four employees and 300 volunteers. Finally, some organisations are run solely by volunteers, for example, *Urwa al-Wuthqa*, *Al-Fayhah* and the *Islamic Anwar al-Huda Association*.

The professional employees working in the organisations include teachers, social workers, nurses, doctors and psychologists, as well as accountants, human resources and PR people. The majority of regular staff seem to be relatively young, while most of the directors are older than fifty. Many people were proud to tell me that they have worked in the organisation all their professional lives. One young woman told me that she has worked in the organisation for five years, but, she continued "I wish I had known about this place many years ago, so I could have worked here even longer!". A few come from other jobs, some from similar organisations, while others have had very different jobs: one had been a project manager in UNRWA, another an officer in the military. Most learned about the job through friends, family or other networks. People working in the organisations all seem to come from the lower or upper middle class. Staff in organisations such as the Jordan River Foundation and JOHUD tend to come from the upper middle class, while staff in, for example, the ICCS centres and Al-Farouq are from the lower middle

class and many may in fact have experienced poverty themselves during their youth (Harmsen 2007:403).

The group of volunteers is more diverse, and at least three different types can be identified. One type is the so-called engaged citizens, including for example the volunteers in the women's association, Islamic Anwar al-Huda. They are all relatively well-to-do women 50-60 years of age who wish to make a difference in their community, which is located in one of the wealthiest neighbourhoods in Amman. They are housewives and see their volunteer work as a chance to get out of the house and socialise while at the same time doing some meaningful work for others. My assistant described them very precisely as nice old women with too much time on their hands. A second type of volunteer includes former beneficiaries who are integrated into the organisation as volunteers, perhaps receiving a small salary. This seems to be a common practice in the ICCS community centres. Some of the women's associations, such as Khawla bint al-Azwar and That al-Netaqueen, also used this practice. In Khawla bint al-Azwar, one of the prostitutes who had previously participated in the health courses of the organisation now works as a counsellor to the other prostitutes, distributing condoms and giving health advice to the women. A third kind of volunteer, the young and resourceful, seems to be a relatively new species in the Middle East. In Jordan, the phenomenon is in its inception and numbers are still low, whereas in Egypt, some of the new volunteer youth organisations already count several thousand members.<sup>48</sup> These new volunteers are young people from the upper middle or upper class, and most are or have been university students. For them, voluntarism is a conscious choice, which they see as what makes their organisation unique and different from other organisations.

While the leadership and board membership in most organisations is still predominantly male,<sup>49</sup> women make up a large proportion of employees in all organisations, in many cases even at mid-level management, working as deputy directors, team-leaders, teachers, PR persons, social workers etc. As the assistant director of one of the ICCS schools jokingly put it: "Apart from maintenance, all educational staff and directors are women. The dean is a man – but we would like to change this to a woman also". Likewise, a large proportion of volunteers are women. In an organisation such as Suna'a al-Hayah, they even make up the

<sup>48</sup> See the following chapter for a detailed account of the Egyptian youth organisations.

<sup>49</sup> Wiktorowicz notes that in a sample of 31 Muslim organisations, women serve on the boards of only five. Of the 248 board members in the sample, 34 (or 14 percent) are women (Wiktorowicz 2001: 87).

majority. This contradicts the findings of Wiktorowicz, for example, who claims that in his visits to various Muslim organisations, he met few female staff and volunteers (2001:88).

#### *2.4.2 Personal gain, religious obligations and compassion*

Participants in the organisations all have their reasons for engaging in social welfare organisations. Some quoted a wish simply to help others, others a religious obligation to help, and yet others personal gains. These factors are not necessarily contradictory: in fact, most people seem to be motivated by a mixture of all three elements, and the distinction should thus been seen primarily as an analytical one. For the participants, there is no contradiction between wanting to do something for yourself, for your god and for others. As one woman said to me, eloquently combining all three elements: “Everyone should do charity – not just because of religion, but because you help others and because it makes you feel good”. In almost all organisations, Islam plays an important role as a motivating factor, and many interviewees quoted Islam as one of the main reasons for engaging in this work. As the women from Khawla bint al-Azwar unanimously and frequently said when telling me about their work: “*Fi sabil li-llah*”, or “we do this for the sake of God”.

For some of the employees, their work is simply a job that needs to be done, and their motivation is economic gain: “I applied for a job in the Ministry of Education, but my husband thought it was too far away. This is closer to my home. I heard about the place from friends, I applied and I passed the test. It doesn’t matter to me whether it is an Islamic place or not, I just wanted to work”, one social worker told me. This was emphasised by the director of an ICCS centre, who said that people come to work there simply because they want a job or because they want to fill up their spare time. This focus on economic gains does not necessarily conflict with other kinds of motivation. As one woman said, charity work gives you a double income – you get your salary and you get your reward from God. Some of the volunteers I met distanced themselves and their work from that of the paid staff, implying that the paid staff are driven solely by money, whereas their own motivation is not material: “Our motivation wasn’t the money we would get out of this; it was the emotions and feelings we would get from people”. Most employees, however, specifically stated that the desire for economic gain was not among the factors that motivated them to work, particularly since the salaries provided are often very low. According to one young man working in one of the ICCS centres, employees are paid a meagre 250 JD pr. Month, which is not even enough to buy

gas for his car. Instead, they (like the volunteers) emphasised other, less tangible aspects when explaining why they chose this particular job – qualities such as the atmosphere or the colleagues. And these qualities are often connected to the religiosity of the place. As one teacher expressed it:

It means a lot to me that it's a Muslim place. Perhaps in other places I would feel a gap of belief. I am not sure I would get along with my colleagues. The fact that it's a Muslim place means that you get support for your own beliefs. You already have the beliefs, but you want to work in a place that supports these beliefs and that makes it easier for you to practice your beliefs.

For many, in particular women, their participation in the organisations is also driven by a wish to be active and play a role in society.<sup>50</sup> As the volunteer director of a women's association explained to me, when she resigned from her job, she suddenly felt useless. She started volunteering in the association, and the other women told her that she was not useless. Another woman told me that she used to work in a manufacturer's shop but had to leave when her mother died and she was expected to take care of her father: "But I wanted to be active, I wanted to do something. So I asked about volunteer work and I heard about this place. When I started, I was so shy, I didn't know how to do speeches and lectures. They taught me at the centre, and I am still learning". For many women, Islam is used as a justification for their participation. As many of the women I talked to said: "Islam is not about just sitting at home doing nothing. You have to engage in society, you have to achieve something". As such, Islam becomes the tool to convince sceptical parents and husbands of the legitimacy of their participation. One of the leaders of the women's organisation Khawla bint al-Azwar told me that, in the beginning, her husband did not want her to work with prostitutes, but then she said to him: "You have to think of the prostituted woman as someone in trouble – how can I as a Muslim leave her alone?" And this argument was difficult for the man to reject, so he had to let her go. A woman from Suna'a al-Hayah told me a similar story: "In the beginning, my husband didn't like it – it was new, he didn't like that I had to leave all the time. But when you have a dream, when you live for something, you say everything is easy, I want to make my dream come true. I told him, okay if you want me to die, I can leave it. But he accepted."

<sup>50</sup> On women and Islamic activism, see Carøe Christiansen (2003).

Many also said that their participation in the organisations is motivated by a wish to develop themselves and learn more. In particular, among the so-called young and resourceful volunteers, primarily from Suna'a al-Hayah, people are extremely articulate about the fact that, through their engagement in volunteer work, they not only help the poor, they also empower themselves. Almost all the young people I talked to said that their involvement in this work had strengthened their capacities and skills in different areas. One had improved his networking skills, which had resulted in several job offers, another had achieved straight A's in school since she started working as a volunteer, and a third was no longer the social recluse she used to be. Finally, many people quoted the mere activity of doing charity as a reward and motivation in itself. One elderly man in one of the oldest organisations in Jordan told me that charity was the hardest of all the jobs he had had in his life, but it was also the most rewarding, the one that had given him the most pleasure. In a similar vein, a young girl from Suna'a al-Hayah ecstatically said that, "When you help people to fix their souls, when you love, when you feel the charity, the giving, you will change – even your face will change. Your soul will be free. I feel sometimes when I help people I am actually flying".

Apart from concrete personal gains, religious obligations also play an important role as a motivating factor for most people. Helping others is a major part of Islam, a basic Islamic principle, as one person said. The duty to give to the poor, or zakat, is one of the five pillars of Islam. Likewise, as already mentioned, concepts such as thawab, as well as the many stories about the good deeds of the Prophet Muhammad and his followers, serve to emphasise the religious obligation to do good. As such, involvement in social welfare work becomes a way of pleasing God and earning points for the next life. When asked why she engaged in this kind of work, the director of the women's organisation Islamic Anwar al-Huda answered: "We think that this job pleases God. You have to do something for your next life. You have to do good things". Others said that doing charity is a kind of believing, that Islam orders people to help and give zakat, or that it gives extra points. Not many people mentioned *da'wa*, the duty to inform non-believers about Islam. Because they are themselves Muslim and because they work in a Muslim environment, most people find it natural to include elements of Islam in their activities, but they do not see this as an active attempt to convert others or make them more religious: "We teach people about raising children in Islam. Most of the community is Muslim", the director of Al-Farouq said, adding: "But we don't try to make people become more Muslim". While, in the majority of organisations, explicit missionary activities are clearly not a part of the agenda, in



a few, such activities do take place.<sup>51</sup> In one case, the director of one of the ICCS centres told me a story about a woman who came to one of the centre's training courses without a headscarf. All the other women on the course were furious, and they approached the director asking how he could allow such a heathen into the centre. And he answered: "This is precisely why we should allow her here – so we can convince her to put on the headscarf". Likewise, according to Harmsen, some ICCS centres will withhold financial aid if beneficiaries do not show up for religious lessons (Harmsen 2007:270).

Last but not least, for almost everybody their involvement in social welfare activities seems to be driven by compassion and a genuine wish actually to change the lives of the people they are helping. Although they sometimes present a rather patronising attitude towards the beneficiaries of their work, the volunteers and employees I talked to all seemed to be very preoccupied with their well-being. One old man who has worked in social welfare for 36 years said: "My father died in the war in 1948. I was an orphan and that's why I understand the situation of the orphans. I made a vow to help them". Another employee told me that, while social welfare work is the hardest kind of work he has ever engaged in, witnessing the changes it makes in people's lives makes it all worth while. Everybody had stories to tell of such changes – of orphans who are studying in university, of single mothers who have learned to knit and are now selling their products on the market, of fathers who no longer beat their children, of women who have left prostitution and now teach other women about sexually transmitted diseases. For most people, such success stories are what motivate them to work. For some, however, these individual improvements are merely steps on the way to something bigger. Added up, changes in the lives of individuals will lead to changes on a much larger scale, and this end goal is what motivates people to engage in social welfare activities: the vision of a different society. The new youth organisations expressed this particularly strongly. Through their engagement in social welfare activities, they hope to change the minds and conditions of people, thus contributing

<sup>51</sup> This leads to another relevant question: What are the views of the beneficiaries on the organisations and the religiosity they are exposed to? Is there any indication that beneficiaries choose a particular organisation because of its religiosity? Or do they simply use that organisation because it offers the services that they need? Since this study did not include interviews with any significant number of beneficiaries, it is difficult to answer such questions. According to some scholars, the religiosity of the organisations is an important aspect of understanding their success – their religiosity gives them better access to poor communities. This is also supported by the World Bank study, *Voices of the Poor*, from 2001, which among other things concludes that poor people often have more confidence in religious organisations than secular ones. In her study of the ICCS, however, Clark notes that the fact that many poor families attempt to receive funding from several organisations challenges the assumption that the poor attribute some form of ideological affiliation or loyalty to the aid they receive from the ICCS (Clark 2004: 110). Likewise, many other people said to me that poor people choose which organisation to go to according to where they receive the best service, not according to what religion was being preached.

to the creation of a better society based on qualities such as social justice, efficiency and good morals – a Muslim renaissance, as their idol, the Egyptian TV preacher Amr Khaled, formulates it. One girl told me: “Changing society is not easy – you have to begin with yourself. You can start with coming on time, make exact appointments, stop lying, and help the poor people”. As Harmsen notes, this vision of a changed society distinguishes modern social welfare organisations from charitable associations in medieval and early modern times, for whom overcoming poverty as a social phenomenon was of little if any interest (Harmsen 2007:196).

## **2.5 The Muslim Brotherhood, the regime and the organisations**

Whereas the two preceding sections have focussed on what can be termed internal aspects of the organisations, such as rationale, strategies and motivations, and have provided examples of the importance of Islam in relation to these aspects, this third and last section turns towards the broader context in which the organisations operate, discussing some of their external relations and the way Islam influences these.

Jordanian social welfare organisations do not operate in a political vacuum, but are influenced (and often even restricted) in their actions by a number of external factors, the regime being the most obvious one. As has been noted in the previous sections of this chapter, all civil society organisations are subject to strict state control and surveillance, and a large number of people complained, either directly or indirectly, of this level of bureaucracy. As one activist put it: “Civil society in Jordan is not democratic and participatory. It is pure administration”. Another said that the amount of bureaucracy is so overwhelming that it might in fact hinder new initiatives:

I do think that the government has a hand in the problems, they are not making room for new paths, new ideas. A good example is that the rules and regulations for organisations are from 1966 – they haven’t changed. That’s a big problem. They don’t allow any space for new thoughts. [...] When people want to do volunteer work, they find all these rules and regulations, which limit them – you can’t go on.

While there is no doubt that all Jordanian civil society organisations are subject to strict control, it is also clear that some are subject to stricter control than others. It seemed to be common wisdom among the organisations I spoke to that while the royal organisations enjoy a high degree of government support and freedom, organisations related to the Muslim Brotherhood have an increasingly problematic

relationship with the regime, reflecting the relationship between the regime and the Brotherhood itself.

The Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood was founded in November 1945 and was granted legal status as a charitable society in January 1946 by King Abdallah I. For many years, relations with the king and the regime were good, and the Muslim Brotherhood was seen as a strategic ally in the fight against what were then the main opposition forces, namely communism and other leftist forces. The Brotherhood was allowed to establish branches and spread throughout the country, and it was one of the few organisations allowed to operate during the years of martial law from 1957 to 1989, when many other civil society organisations and all political parties were prohibited from organising.<sup>52</sup> Likewise, prominent members were often appointed ministers in especially the Ministries of Justice and Education. The Muslim Brotherhood for its part openly backed the King and the regime when necessary, for instance, in the King's confrontations with Arab nationalists (Wiktorowicz 2001:97). While history has also witnessed clashes between the regime and the Muslim Brotherhood, until recent years a strong sense of loyalty has prevailed between the two. However, this trust now seems to be crumbling. In particular, the regime's peace negotiations with Israel, starting at the beginning of the 1990s, became a watershed in relations between the regime and the Brotherhood. As one researcher noted, Oraib al-Rantawi from the Al-Quds Centre for Political Studies, the regime began to see the Muslim Brotherhood as part of the problem, rather than part of the solution, while the Brotherhood began to see the government as involved in an alliance with the US and Israel.<sup>53</sup> In the following years, the regime took various steps to control the Muslim Brotherhood, something that has only intensified under the new king.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Compared to other Arab countries, Muslim groups and organisations have generally been allowed more organisational freedom and autonomy in Jordan, and Jordan is one of the few states in which the Muslim Brotherhood has obtained legal status (Noyon 2003: 84).

<sup>53</sup> As one representative of the Muslim Brotherhood expressed it: "They asked us to adopt their principles and policies, to follow them, and market their policies. But we don't agree with them, especially not as regards the agreement with Israel in 1994, the invasion of Iraq by the American forces, the cooperation between Jordan and USA, the constant limitations of the freedom and community work – all these are reasons for the growing differences between the visions of the government and the Muslim Brotherhood".

<sup>54</sup> A recent example of the troubled relations between the regime and the Muslim Brotherhood is the imprisonment of four members of parliament from the Islamic Action Front who offered their condolences to the family of the terrorist Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi. They were later pardoned by the King. However, pardoning someone does not erase that person's punishment, meaning that the members of parliament are in effect still convicted to 13 months of prison. Since a person cannot be a member of parliament with a sentence of more than 12 months, they can no longer be members of parliament.

Traditionally, the Muslim Brotherhood has had strong relationships with many civil society organisations, most obviously with the Islamic Centre Charity Society, established by members of the Brotherhood in 1963, but also with other organisations. During an interview, a spokesperson from the Brotherhood explained in detail relations between the Brotherhood and the various civil society organisations: While the ICCS is the only organisation directly under the authority of the Brotherhood, there are some other organisations that are connected to it, although they are established by individuals. An example of such an organisation is Al-Afaf, whose chairman is a member of the Muslim Brotherhood's general assembly. Furthermore, a few women's organisations, small community associations and cultural organisations such as the Society for the Protection of the Holy Quran are also connected to the Brotherhood, which plays an important role in the professional associations and the student councils, as has been mentioned above.

Many of these organisations have, in one way or another, felt the consequences of the increasingly tense relations between the regime and the Brotherhood. As noted earlier, the professional associations and the student councils have been made subject to new laws aimed at restricting the influence of the Brotherhood, and its members are subject to strict surveillance, as one of its representatives told me: "The government [...] controls all members, whether they work in student unions, in the professional associations or somewhere else. There are limits to how much a member of the Muslim Brotherhood can get promoted, for instance". Furthermore, and particularly relevant to this analysis, in July 2006 the Islamic Centre Charity Society was charged with corruption. The executive board of the ICCS was disbanded and a government-appointed committee was put in its place to run the organisation during the investigations. These have now lasted more than a year without apparent results, prompting many to conclude that the whole affair was primarily meant as a show of force on the part of the government.

At a celebration of the anniversary of the Islamic Hospital, one high-ranking member of the Muslim Brotherhood and a consultant to the ICCS openly voiced this criticism in his speech to the public, rhetorically targeting the regime: "Why do you think we are the enemy? We build hospitals, we help the people, we are the ones who can unite Jordan". But not everybody can say things like that, my companion at the event made clear to me. Because this man is retired and because he is from an important family, he can. Ordinary people have to keep a low profile as regards their views on the Brotherhood and the regime. This attitude was clearly reflected in the ICCS and other organisations closely linked to the Brotherhood.

In my interview with a representative from Al-Afaf, for instance, it was evident that the organisation itself is aware of its image as a Muslim Brotherhood affiliation, but the representative clearly sought to downplay this connection: "Some people classify us in relation to the Muslim Brotherhood. But in Jordan, most people are Muslims. We are Muslims; we are not connected to any political Islamic movement". Even in the ICCS, only a few people were willing to talk about this relationship. Most ICCS representatives I talked to either avoided talking about the Muslim Brotherhood or denied there was a connection. Only one person talked openly about it: "In reality, the ICCS, the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamic Action Front have the same thoughts. Before, we used to be separate, every organisation working on its own, but now it all goes together – it all goes according to the Islamic movement. We have the same goals – there's more cooperation". One person said that, while there is definitely a connection between the ICCS, the Islamic Action Front and the Brotherhood, this is a secret: "They have a consultancy board consisting of people from the Islamic Action Front, the Muslim Brotherhood and the ICCS; it's hidden, but they make the decisions". He was worried about being under surveillance, and said that people's phones are being tapped and many are constantly being questioned by the police.

People from organisations not directly connected to the Brotherhood seemed much less wary of speaking up about the problematic relationships between the regime, the Brotherhood and the ICCS. A few organisations were downright critical of the connection between the Muslim Brotherhood and the ICCS, often claiming that their social welfare activities function as a way of attracting people to the Islamic Action Front. As one person said: "The Muslim Brotherhood is well-organised and very good when it comes to charity. But their problem is that they have a political agenda". The director of another organisation shared this view: "They ask people to vote for them, they have the money in one hand and the voting ballot in the other". Among scholars, some supported this claim, arguing that these organisations simply buy poor people's votes by offering them services. According to one scholar, who preferred to remain anonymous, the activities and reach of the Islamic Centre Charity Society in Jordan was in fact one of the main reasons for the victory of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamic Action Front in the 1989 elections. Furthermore, Musa Schteiwi from the Jordan Centre for Social Research told me that, in order to convince people to vote for the Islamic Action Front, members of the ICCS will call them, bring them to the polling stations in buses, make propaganda and even intimidate them. And, as he said, "they use religion in this process". Likewise, when conducting fieldwork during the 2003 elections, Egbert Harmsen noted that ICCS workers were, to varying degrees,

engaged in election campaigns on behalf of the Islamic Action Front, and information material on the party was available in several centres (Harmsen 2007:72).

The majority, however, refuted this accusation and stressed the non-political nature of most social welfare organisations, including the ICCS. One representative from UNRWA who has cooperated with the ICCS in the refugee camps said that she had never heard of any cases of the organisation laying down conditions for its help: "At least in the camps, all they do is help other people". Some acknowledged the political stances of the ICCS and its connections to the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamic Action Front, but said that they trust the organisation to be able to distinguish between this and their charity work. As one employee at the Queen Zein Institute for Development remarked, the organisation and the people working there might have a political agenda, but they do not ask people to vote for them when they do charity work. This is supported by research conducted by the political scientist Sami al-Khazendar, suggesting that workers in the ICCS are not primarily motivated by a desire for political influence, but by a wish to provide spiritual, material and financial aid to beneficiaries, and further, that the beneficiaries of ICCS activities do not necessarily see a connection between the services they receive from the ICCS and a vote for the Islamic Action Front (Harmsen 2007:205). On the other hand, this does not mean that there *are* no connections between the two, merely that the connections are perhaps not as explicit or conscious as some think. Although ICCS staff may not ask beneficiaries directly to vote for them, beneficiaries' satisfaction with the services received may be expressed in political support for the Islamic Action Front.

In the eyes of most people, be it researchers, organisational representatives or ordinary citizens, the ICCS is seen as a well-organised, democratic and transparent social welfare organisation, and many openly stated that the replacement of the ICCS board was a political game that had nothing to do with corruption. In fact, even a government representative from the National Aid Fund took the side of the ICCS, stating that, despite what the government says, he still thinks that the organisation does a good job. The director of one organisation said to me:

They changed the director. But they didn't do anything wrong – it's a political issue. They are considered to be the social wing of the Muslim Brotherhood, and the government wants to weaken them. But the population supports them because they are honest, transparent, they tell you how they work, where the money goes.

Some argue that, in the end, the government's charges of corruption could end up strengthening the Muslim Brotherhood and the ICCS, as people will sympathise with them: "People know that the government is more corrupt", the researcher Oraib al-Rantawi noted somewhat sarcastically. While their religiosity is obviously not the only reason for the popularity of the Muslim Brotherhood and the ICCS, it plays an important role. As Bakr M. al-Hiyari expressed it: "The fact that they are Islamic makes people think that they are good and nice. Even if you are not religious, you are programmed to think that they are nice and good. The label is important. It gives them accept, credibility – sometimes over-credibility".

## **2.6 Concluding remarks**

The almost 900 social welfare organisations in Jordan constitute a diverse group of organisations, each of which, in their own way, seek to provide support to disadvantaged people in the country. Overall, the group can be divided into six types of organisation: general social welfare organisations, women's associations, cooperatives, royal organisations, youth organisations and international organisations. Typical activities include financial and material aid, care activities, education, vocational training, health services and income-generating projects. The majority of organisations reach out to a relatively small number of beneficiaries, while the royal organisations, the international organisations and a few others, such as the Islamic Centre Charity Society, count their beneficiaries in several thousands. In most organisations, a small group of members make up the organisation's board and also work as volunteers implementing its activities. Some organisations employ one or two people to take care of administrative matters, while a few are run entirely by professional staff. Most organisations base their income on membership fees and donations, often from local individuals and businesses. Not many seem to receive government support, and only a few receive any funding from international donors.

Just as the social welfare organisations differ in terms of organisational structures, participants and activities, they also differ as regards the role of Islam. Some organisations are explicitly non-religious or even anti-religious, while others are influenced by religion in all they do and say. For the majority, however, this sharp divide between the religious and the non-religious does not make much sense. Rather than whether or not Islam plays a role for the organisations, their participants and activities, it is a question of how and in what ways it does so. The foregoing analysis has provided examples of some of those aspects to which Islam seems to be of particular relevance

to the organisations, namely rationale and strategies, motivations and relations with the regime and the Muslim Brotherhood.

For most organisations, Islam plays an important role as the underlying rationale for their engagement in social welfare. Based on stories and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, as well as the Islamic concepts of thawab, sadaqa and zakat, a strong connection between Islam and social welfare is constructed. This understanding of social welfare and Islam as being closely connected influences the strategies and concrete activities of many organisations, but not necessarily as one might expect. Many scholars, as well as the representatives of more secular organisations such as the royal ones, assume that religiously inspired organisations have a very traditional and charity-oriented approach to social welfare. While some of the organisations studied here did present examples of this, many actually seem to have a more development-oriented approach. While this approach in many ways resembles that of Western development NGOs, it cannot be taken to be a simple rejection of traditional religious charity in favour of a secular approach. Rather, the organisations merge their understanding of development with Islamic aspects, thus creating a specifically Muslim approach to development.

This approach is reflected in the organisations' activities and practices. Frustrated with the limitations of traditional alms-giving, many organisations have shifted to micro-finance and income-generating projects, a shift that is often explained with a reference to the story about Muhammad who, instead of money, gives the poor boy an axe and tells him to go and cut some wood to sell. Likewise, concepts such as women's rights and empowerment are popular in almost all organisations, and while their implementation seems still to be limited by traditional religious and cultural gender practices in the majority of organisations, a few manage actually to integrate this discourse into practice, often using Islam as a tool in the process. Finally, whereas many organisations seem to focus on very traditional kinds of education, such as Quran recital and memorising, and arguably encourage passive rather than active participation, some organisations combine these activities with methods of critical thinking, problem-solving and discussion, creating a seemingly unproblematic synthesis between Islam and modern education.

For those implementing all these activities, Islam also plays a significant role as a motivational factor. For a few people, their engagement in social welfare is simply a job like any other job, and they are primarily motivated by a need for economic gain. However, most people quote other, less tangible factors such as the atmosphere or the colleagues, often linking these factors to the religiosity of the organisation.



Many, in particular women, also cite a desire to be active and to play a role in society, and they often use Islam as a tool to convince sceptical parents and husbands of their participation. Others say that their participation is a way to develop their personality and skills, while yet others say that the mere activity of doing charity is a reward and motivation in itself. Apart from these different kinds of personal gain, many also mention religious obligations as an important motivational factor. As already noted, most people regard charity as an important part of Islam, and as such, involvement in social welfare activities becomes a way of pleasing God and ensuring a place in heaven. Not many mention *da'wa*, the duty to inform other about Islam, and nobody sees their involvement in social welfare activism in this light, at least not officially. In practice, however, missionary activities do appear to take place in a few organisations. Last but not least, for almost everybody, participation seems to be driven by a genuine wish to contribute to improving the lives of the people, and perhaps even improving society.

Moving from the perspective of the individual organisations to the broader context, it becomes clear that Islam also plays a significant role here, albeit in much more concrete terms. While all civil society organisations in Jordan are subject to strict state control and surveillance, it is clear that some are subject to stricter control than others. Royal organisations most often enjoy a high degree of state support and organisational freedom, whereas organisations related to the Muslim Brotherhood have an increasingly problematic relationship with the regime, mirroring the Brotherhood's own troubled relations with it. One of the most obvious examples of this is the replacement of the ICCS executive board with a government-appointed board following charges of corruption in the organisation. A few organisations and scholars support the regime, adding to the charges that ICCS activities supposedly function as ways of attracting votes for the Islamic Action Front. Most people, however, reject this argument and place themselves on the side of the ICCS and the Muslim Brotherhood, which they see as democratic, transparent and honest. While their religiosity is not the only reason for this popularity, Islam does play a major role, creating a common frame of resonance and recognition.

However, the ways in which Islam influences these organisations is one thing – another is what *kinds* of Islam are exerting these influences. The religious discourses and practices of Muslim civil society actors cannot be described in simple terms: to say that someone is a Muslim or Islamic is not self-explanatory, but can mean a wide range of things. Thus, among Jordanian social welfare organisations, at least four different kinds of Muslim discourse can be identified: a militant religious discourse,

a conservative discourse, a moderate discourse and liberal discourse.<sup>55</sup> While an analysis of these discourses was not among the main aims of this initial study, but will be explored in more detail in later studies, a few preliminary considerations on the topic should nonetheless be included here.

Not surprisingly, the militant discourse arguing for the need for violent *jihad* against heretical regimes was not visible in any of the social welfare organisations I visited. Recent years have witnessed the introduction of new anti-terror legislation, often explicitly aimed at catching individuals and groups adhering to such ideologies, and people supporting these views keep a very low profile. Nonetheless, a few individuals did express their sympathies with people known to be associated with the militant Salafi movement, such as Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi.

The conservative discourse is much more popular and might in fact represent the most common interpretation of Islam among the social welfare organisations. Conservative Muslims generally profess a relatively literal interpretation of the Quran, emphasise the importance of rituals such as prayer, fasting and the correct clothing, and usually often oppose abortion, homosexuality as well as gender equality in a Western sense. Most accept ideas of democracy, but adapt these to their own traditionalist conceptions (Harmsen 2007:68). Examples of this discourse are found in organisations such as the Islamic Anwar al-Huda Women's Association, the Urwa al-Wuthqa Welfare Association, the ICCS *Dar al-Achram* school and several ICCS centres.<sup>56</sup>

The moderate discourse is characterised by being precisely that – moderate, in the sense that it is a position consciously situated between conservatives and liberals, sometimes with the stated goal of mediating between the two. While it still emphasises the importance and relevance of Islam to all aspects of life, it does so in a less ritualistic and formalistic manner than the conservatives. Likewise, it is open to concepts such as human rights and gender equality, but insists on a specifically Muslim interpretation of these. Examples are Al-Afaf, led by a member of the Muslim Centre Party, Al-Afaf, certain ICCS centres, Al-Farouq and to a certain degree Khawla Bint al-Azwar.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Apart from these Muslim discourses, in Jordan we also find other religious discourses, in particular Christian discourses, as well as various non-religious discourses. Since the current analysis deals with the role of Islam in civil society organisations, these discourses are not included in the above.

<sup>56</sup> Apart from the social welfare organisations, this discourse is found among conservative Salafis, in major parts of the Muslim Brotherhood, and in the missionary movement Jamayat al-Da'wa wal Tabligh.

<sup>57</sup> On the political scene, moderates are found in certain parts of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Islamic Action Front and the Muslim Centre Party (Hizb al-Wasat al-Islami). Furthermore, the initiative Amman Message, launched by King Abdallah and endorsed by more than 500 leading Muslim scholars all over the world, is also a clear example of a moderate discourse. For further information, see [www.ammanmessage.com](http://www.ammanmessage.com).

Finally, the religiously liberal discourse articulates Islam as a primarily private matter and as such not necessarily relevant to all aspects of life. Furthermore, according to this discourse, there is no conflict between Islam and concepts such as human rights and gender equality. In fact, whereas the moderates often interpret such concepts from an Islamic point of view, it could be argued that liberals interpret Islam from the point of view of human rights or gender equality. Examples of the liberal discourse are relatively few, but they can be found among some royal development organisations such as Tkiyet Um Ali and the Young Muslim Women's Association. Among these organisations, Islam primarily plays a role in relation to the motivation of individual participants. However, some of the organisations also make use of Islam in their activities when deemed opportune. For instance, while otherwise completely non-religious, the Jordan River Foundation uses verses from the Quran when training people in issues of child safety<sup>58</sup>.

As has been hinted at above, Islam is not a homogeneous entity but rather a plethora of different discourses and practices – a diversity that is reflected in the group of civil society organisations studied here. It is my hope that the preceding empirical examples and descriptions of Jordanian social welfare organisations and Islam may provide a useful starting point for further analysis of the diverse religious discourses and practices found in Jordanian civil society.

<sup>58</sup> Naturally, some organisations fall outside these four categories. One example is the youth organisation Suna'a al-Hayah. On one hand, many of the organisation's members prefer not to shake hands with the opposite sex, and many activities are gender segregated, leading one to assume a rather conservative, ritualistic understanding of Islam. On the other hand, the young people have very tolerant attitudes towards different interpretations of Islam, a typical characteristic of more liberal discourses. One young man told me: "Islam is not only about how you dress, it's about what you believe in and what you give to the community".

### **3. New youth organisations and Islam in Egypt**

Recently, a new group of actors has emerged in Egyptian civil society. During the last five to ten years, an increasing number of primarily urban upper middle class young people have started engaging in voluntary social welfare activities and forming their own organisations. These organisations distinguish themselves from other Egyptian youth organisations, as well as from more traditional religious organisations. As such they present a new phenomenon. They engage in social welfare activities, but do so in other ways than many traditional social welfare organisations. They are established and dominated by young people, but while many other youth organisations have a secular or non-religious approach, for these organisations Islam plays an important role.

Based on concrete empirical studies, this chapter offers an analysis of some of these new religiously oriented youth organisations. In particular, aspects of identity and meaning construction, participants, practices and relationships will be explored, paying special attention to the role of Islam. The first section provides a short introduction to the history and context of civil society in Egypt as well as important Muslim actors within this field. This is followed by an introduction to the group of new youth organisations. The third section deals with the rationale, strategies and activities of these organisations. What are the problems they identify in Egyptian society, and how do they approach them? Here, three approaches are presented by participants in the youth organisations, namely the importance of a development-oriented approach to social welfare, a connection between youth and voluntarism, and finally a combination of Islam and modern management. The analysis will pay particular attention to the role of Islam in the formulation and implementation of these approaches. The fourth section takes a closer look at the participants in the organisations. Who are they, and what are the motivations of their involvement? Finally, the fifth section places the youth organisations back in their context by discussing relationships between the organisations and the regime. The sixth section sums up the most important findings of the study and presents further perspectives on this new group of civil society actors.

#### **3.1 Islam and civil society in Egypt**

##### *3.1.1 History and context of Egyptian civil society*

Like Jordan, Egypt can be characterised as having a semi-authoritarian form of rule with democratic elements. The country is ruled by a regime headed by Hosni

Mubarak, president since 1981, and his governing party, the National Democratic Party. Mubarak has institutionalised a party system, which is made up by the National Democratic Party in the centre and an array of small opposition parties to its left and right.<sup>59</sup> The president and the ruling party have the predominant power, the opposition parties being weak and divided and not posing any credible alternatives to the government party (Albrecht 2005). There are many restrictions on political participation, as well as on the formation of new parties in Egypt. Furthermore, the Emergency Law<sup>60</sup> restricts many basic rights of citizens, for example, by allowing the arrest of citizens without charge and restricting the right to freedom of association (CIVICUS 2006:39-50).

Instead of political parties, opposition is primarily expressed through political pressure groups in civil society such as the Muslim Brotherhood and the *Kifaya* movement. Unlike Jordan, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt is an illegal organisation and is not recognised as a political party.<sup>61</sup> However, members of the Muslim Brotherhood are known to express their views publicly and openly, although they do not explicitly identify themselves as members of the organisation, and in elections they typically compete as independents or members of secular parties. A more recent but similarly important movement is Kifaya or the Egyptian Movement for Change, established in 2004 as a broad, grassroots coalition primarily concerned to oppose President Mubarak's presidency and the Emergency Law. It draws its support from across Egypt's political spectrum, including Nasserites, Liberals and Leftists, as well as members of the Muslim Brotherhood. Kifaya is famous throughout the Middle East for categorically crossing former "red lines" by arranging mass demonstrations and protests that attract a large and broad mass of supporters (Browers 2007).

Partly because of the ongoing struggle between the regime and the Muslim Brotherhood and militant Islamic groups, Islam has always played an important role in the public sphere of this predominantly Muslim society.<sup>62</sup> Since President Sadat, the Egyptian regime has used Islam to legitimise its rule. It has promoted the Islamisation of the public space and the educational system,<sup>63</sup> and has allowed members of the

<sup>59</sup> The most important of these are the *Wafd* Party, which espouses a liberal ideology, the leftist *Tagammu* Party, and the Nasserite Party which embraces a pan-Arab Nasserite ideology.

<sup>60</sup> The Emergency Law has been in effect since the assassination of President Sadat in 1981. With the Egyptian government's recent launch of an anti-terrorism law, many human rights organisations fear that the situation in the country might even worsen.

<sup>61</sup> Current Egyptian law prohibits the formation of political parties based on religion.

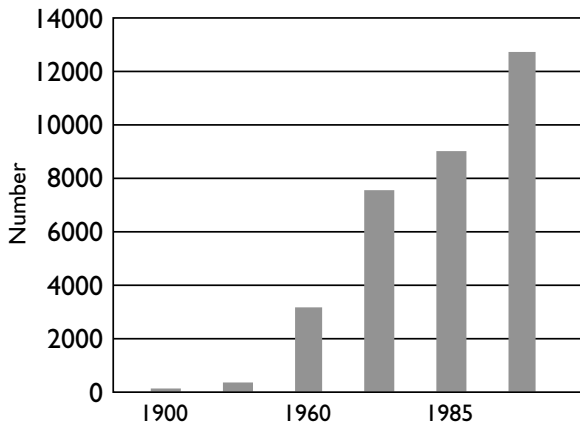
<sup>62</sup> Muslims constitute approximately 90 percent of the total population.

<sup>63</sup> For analyses of Islam and the educational system, see e.g. Starrett 1998.

Muslim Brotherhood to participate in elections to professional syndicates and the parliament. However, at the same time the regime has carried out several attacks on Muslim Brotherhood leaders and activists, and the Muslim Brotherhood has been prohibited from operating as a political party (Meital 2006).

A similar ambiguity characterises the relationship between the regime and civil society organisations that display a clear religiosity. Due to the threat that these organisations might pose to the power and legitimacy of the Egyptian state, different Egyptian governments have tried to contain their power and influence. Under Mubarak, as under earlier regimes, the government has used a policy mix of repression and co-optation towards the different civil society organisations. Through different legal mechanisms, it has tried to co-opt organisations in order to make use of their resources and mass base for its own interest (AbdelRahman 2004). Civil society activists have long tried to persuade the state to loosen its grip on civil society, but so far no major improvements have been achieved. Muslim civil society organisations are tolerated by the state, but only if they manage to keep within the red lines. For example, they are not allowed to practice politics, and no organisation can openly admit to having connections with the Muslim Brotherhood.

Compared to other Middle Eastern countries, Egypt has a relatively long tradition of civil society organisations. By the middle of the nineteenth century, shortly after the founding of the modern Egyptian state, organised charity associations and mutual aid societies began to appear (LaTowsky 1997). The first organisations were established primarily by foreigners serving foreign nationals and the Christian population in Egypt. Examples of these are the French Benevolent Association, established in 1865, and the St. Vincent de Paul Society, established in 1853. A few decades later, and very much inspired by these organisations, the first Muslim and Coptic social welfare organisations started to appear. Among the largest were the Coptic Association dating from 1891 and the Islamic Charity Organisation established in 1896. Later, from the 1920s to the 1950s, a sizable community of private associations in Egypt's major cities, comprising general charity, religious welfare, cultural and mutual aid societies, were established by migrants and a small but expanding middle class of urban professionals and civil servants (LaTowsky 1997). Among these was the Muslim Brotherhood, founded in 1928.

*Graph I: Growth of civil society organisations in Egypt<sup>64</sup>*

As with other statistical information on Egypt, there is no directory giving the exact number of civil society organisations today.<sup>65</sup> Depending on the definitions used, the total number is estimated to be somewhere between 14,000 and 22,000 (AbdelRahman 2004:44, Clark 2004:50),<sup>66</sup> of which the majority, or 80 percent, are found in urban areas, especially in the Cairo governorate (CIVICUS 2006:29). Although less than half of all organisations are said to be active (AbdelRahman 2004:121), this still makes Egypt among the countries in the Middle East and South with the largest civil societies (LaTowsky 1997). Membership of Egyptian civil society organisations in 1992 was approximately 3 million, and the same year the number of beneficiaries was estimated at approximately 5.5 million Egyptian citizens (Clark 2004:50).

Social welfare organisations constitute the vast majority of all civil society organisations in Egypt. Organisations in this group include charities, zakat committees, development NGOs, cooperatives, orphanages, training centres, schools, clinics and hospitals, all focusing their services and activities on the country's many poor.<sup>67</sup> Other important actors in civil society are the cultural, sports and scout organisa-

<sup>64</sup> Source: AbdelRahman 2004

<sup>65</sup> In general, the statistical information on civil society organisations in Egypt is both outdated and deficient, making it difficult to relate findings on the new youth organisations to information on other civil society actors.

<sup>66</sup> In some studies, professional associations, such as professional syndicates and trade unions, and even political parties are included, while in other studies the number includes only social and cultural organisations.

<sup>67</sup> Egypt suffers from widespread poverty as well as a high rate of illiteracy. 43.9 percent of the population live on less than 2 dollars a day, and 44 percent of the adult population are illiterate (CIVICUS 2006:44).

tions, who are engaged in recreational activities such as sport, culture, art, heritage, music, education and science. The more than 1,000 youth centres distributed all over Egypt and supervised by the Ministry of Youth represent one of the largest groups within this category.

Among the strongest civil society actors in Egypt are the country's 22 professional syndicates, with a total membership of approximately 3.5 million people. Due to the general weakness of political parties, much political activity has been transferred to the syndicates (Fahmy 1998:551). A quite different, but similarly outspoken and politically involved group of civil society actors are the small and rather weak group of advocacy organisations, engaged in matters such as the environment, human rights or women's issues. The Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights (EOHR) and the Arab Women's Solidarity Association are among the most important actors here. These organisations have strong links with another important group of actors, namely international donor organisations and institutions, which provide funds and development assistance. Because of the country's long history of foreign presence and involvement, as well as the central role and location of Cairo in the region, Egypt is among the Middle Eastern countries with the largest presence of foreign and international organisations and institutions. Among these are UN agencies, the World Bank, Care and Save the Children, as well as some Muslim NGOs.

Finally, Egyptian civil society also hosts a number of movements, informal networks and community groups. On a smaller scale we find mosque congregational groups, da'wa movements and personal networks for the collection of money for charities. On a larger scale, there is the movement of the Muslim Brotherhood, Kifaya and the more fluid and loosely structured Salafi movement.

### *3.1.2 Important Muslim actors in Egyptian civil society*

As several recent studies have shown, Islam plays a significant – and most likely increasing – role in Egyptian civil society.<sup>68</sup> But here, as in Jordan, Muslim civil society actors do not constitute a homogenous group. Instead, they are to be found among a wide range of different types of civil society actors. As in Jordan, some of the strongest and most influential Muslim actors are found among the professional associations, the social welfare organisations and the more fluid category of movements, informal

<sup>68</sup> See e.g. Sullivan 1994, Ibrahim et al. 1996, Sullivan and Abed-Kotob 1999, Bayat 2000, Wickham 2002 and Clark 2004.



networks and community groups.<sup>69</sup> Islam plays a significant role in the professional syndicates because of the strong influence of the Muslim Brotherhood, which dominates the councils of the five most active syndicates, namely the doctors, engineers, pharmacists, scientists and lawyers (AbdelRahman 2004, CIVICUS 2006). As for social welfare organisations, a very large proportion of these are said to be Muslim (Clark 2004).<sup>70</sup> This group comprises a wide variety of organisations, including small-scale local mosque-related charities and community-based associations, large organisations with branches all over the country, zakat committees, schools, clinics, orphanages, women's organisations, etc. *Al-Jama'iyya al-Shar'iyya*, dating from 1912, and the more recent *Mahmoud Mosque Association* established in 1976 are among the largest and most influential.

A very recent but increasingly popular phenomenon is the movement surrounding the young Egyptian "accountant-turned-preacher" *Amr Khaled* and other new preachers like him.<sup>71</sup> While still working as an accountant, Amr Khaled started preaching in mosques and private clubs in the early 1990s. His audience grew rapidly, and today his shows are broadcast widely on a number of satellite channels, including the popular religiously oriented *Iqra* channel. His main audience in Egypt is young people, in particular young women, from the upper-middle class, but his messages reach millions of young Muslims all over the Middle East, as well as in Europe and North America. Recently, Amr Khaled has been attacked from many sides. Liberals and secularists accuse him of being too conservative, while traditional sheikhs and the Salafi movement find him too moderate (Atia 2005). In 2002 the Egyptian government is said to have forced Amr Khaled to leave Egypt, but he continued his increasingly popular shows from abroad. Lately, his popularity seems to be decreasing in Egypt, whether from a fear of government retaliation or simply because he no longer possesses the charm of novelty. However, rather than representing an isolated phenomenon, it seems that Amr Khaled has become the catalyst for a much broader trend facilitated by new media such as the internet and satellite TV, and showing, among other things, the growing number of preachers with a similar style and message.

<sup>69</sup> Due to the general lack of statistics fielding this area, it is difficult to determine the exact number of Muslim civil society organisations. Also, as noted above, the question remains on what basis we determine whether an organisation is Muslim or not. According to Kandil (cf. Clark 2004: 50), so-called "Islamic NGOs" constituted approximately 43 percent of all Egyptian civil society organisations in Egypt in 1991, and some scholars set the number even higher than that. For comparison, the number was only about 16 percent in the 1960s and 30 percent in the 1970s (AbdelRahman 2004:138).

<sup>70</sup> Christian constitute approximately ten percent of the total Egyptian population, and naturally a considerable number of Christian organisations are found among the group of social welfare organisations. However, since focus of this study is on Islam and civil society, they will not be included in the analysis.

<sup>71</sup> Other similar Egyptian popular preachers are Umar Abd al-Kafi and Khalid al-Jindi (Bayat 2007:149).

This movement, often referred to as “Islam light” or “air-conditioned Islam” by both critics and adherents (Haenni and Tammam 2003), is characterised by the fact that its spokespersons are lay people who speak an easily understandable colloquial Arabic rather than the standard Arabic spoken by the traditional sheikhs. Their style is soft and compassionate, not disciplinary and strict. As Amr Khaled has put it: “My main concern is to make young people love religion instead of fearing it”.<sup>72</sup> These preachers do not dwell on rigorously detailed rituals and regulations, which are often seen as irrelevant and incomprehensible to many young people. Instead they focus on how to reconcile Islam with a modern life-style (Bayat 2007:151-5).

The movement has inspired young people all over Egypt to establish their own organisations, and it also had an influence on some already existing organisations. In line with Amr Khaled and similar lay preachers, the young people in these organisations believe in making Islam a natural part of their and their target groups’ daily lives. Introducing a new approach of Islam and voluntarism, the organisations combine conventional social welfare activities with a human development approach, as well as activities associated with advocacy and awareness-raising aimed at mobilising young people to participate in civil society. These organisations represent a minor but growing part of Egyptian civil society. And because of their distinct constituency, their strong emphasis on development and their new and somehow different understanding and application of Islam, they represent an interesting focus for a study of Islam and civil society in Egypt.

In total, nine religiously oriented youth organisations were studied in depth during the fieldwork period: *Alashanik Ya Baladi*, *Bayan*, *Boraq*, *Mazeed*, *Misr Shoryan al-Ata’a*, *Resala*, *Sama*, *Suna’a al-Hayah* and *Zedny*.<sup>73</sup> In order to relate these youth organisations to the broader field of social welfare organisations in Egypt, interviews with participants from five more traditional Muslim social welfare organisations were conducted. In addition, I visited two cultural Muslim organisations and three semi-governmental organisations, all targeting youth. These interviews provide an insight into how participants in other, more traditional institutions and civil society organisations view the new youth organisations. Finally, three more secular-oriented youth organisations were studied in order to relate the religiously oriented youth organisations to the general movement of youth and voluntarism in Egypt.

<sup>72</sup> Interview with *Al-Abram Weekly*; cf. Wise p. 57.

<sup>73</sup> Though there definitely are more than nine youth organisations in Cairo (I estimate the number at a maximum of twenty organisations at the time of my fieldwork), the organisations in this study were the most famous among the people I talked to.

### **3.2 The new youth organisations: an introduction to the field**

As noted already, this group of youth organisations is a very recent phenomenon in Egypt. All the organisations in this study were established around 2000 or later. The majority of them started as student initiatives at universities in Cairo. One example is Resala, which is the oldest and largest of the organisations in this study. Resala started as a student initiative at the Faculty of Engineering at Cairo University in 1999. Initially, its activities were blood donation, college services and visits to orphanages, nursing homes and hospitals. In 2000, a rich businessman donated a piece of land to the organisation, and the members decided to register Resala as a formal NGO. Today, it is the largest voluntary organisation in the Arab world, with approximately 50,000 volunteers and 25 branches all over Egypt. Compared to Resala most other new youth organisations are much smaller in size and reach, but they have many similarities with this pioneer organisation when it comes to organisation, activities, participants, etc.

Like other so-called voluntary civic associations, the new youth organisations are subject to a number of very extensive rules and regulations, outlined in NGO Law 84 of 2002. All organisations must register with the Ministry of Social Affairs, where they are classified according to their activities. They are restricted to working in this field of activities and cannot widen or change their scope without prior permission.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, they are required to have a board of members of four, including at least a president, vice-president, treasurer and secretary (CIVICUS 2006).

Most of the activities of these organisations fall under the category of social welfare. While some organisations are specialised in fields such as health care or human development, others direct their efforts to the development of certain geographical areas, carrying out projects and activities of very different kinds. Yet others pursue a wide variety of activities at different geographical locations. Generally speaking, they address two groups of people, poor families and young people. In some cases the target groups are poor families in general, but most organisations try to direct their efforts at particularly vulnerable groups, such as women, orphans, students,

<sup>74</sup> The thirteen categories of activity are: social assistance; religious, scientific and cultural services; maternity and child care; family welfare; special categories and handicapped welfare; old-age welfare; friendship among peoples; family planning; social protection; management and administration; prison inmates' welfare; literacy; and multiple services (Clark 2004:49). One exception is the large group of so-called Community Development Organisations (CDAs), registered under a separate category at the Ministry of Social Affairs. Unlike organisations in the other categories, they are allowed to carry out a wide range of activities and services. Some have strong ties with the state authorities, they receive substantial subsidies from the government and have volunteer boards, though the staff are usually paid by the Ministry of Social Affairs (LaTowsky 1997).

the disabled or the elderly. Two organisations, Bayan and Zedny, are special cases. Their beneficiaries are not specifically poor people, but young students and college graduates, primarily from the middle class, who lack the necessary skills to enter the labour market.<sup>75</sup>

The board members are those responsible for the daily management and running of the organisation. Other participants are the volunteers and the ordinary members who participate in the activities, sometimes paying an annual membership fee to the organisation. Most of the organisations have a small headquarters from which they plan and organise their activities. The majority of these headquarters are found in the neighbourhoods where most of the members and volunteers live or where the universities are situated, often middle or upper middle-class residential areas such as Nasr City and Heliopolis. Alashanik Ya Baladi is an exception. Though most of the members and volunteers are from the upper middle class, their headquarters are in a very poor neighbourhood in Old Cairo. Two of the organisations I studied, Zedny and Bayan, work through larger and more traditional mosque-related Muslim social welfare organisations, which provide them with offices and lecture facilities.

The NGO law permits seven possible ways for civil society organisations to obtain revenues, namely members' subscription, fees for services rendered, *waqf* revenues, income from lottery sale and exhibitions, donations from indigenous sources, assistance from foreign donors and Egyptian government aid (Clark 2004:59). According to a recent survey among Egyptian social welfare organisations, membership fees represent the prime source of funding, with donations from indigenous sources being the second most important source (CIVICUS 2006:36). Religious social welfare organisations, and in particular Muslim organisations, are the most successful at raising funds and donations locally (Clark 2004:60). This is also the case for the group of youth organisations studied here. Like other religious organisations, they do not seem to have any difficulties in attracting donations from private Egyptians, and they do very little advertising for their organisations in order to attract funds.<sup>76</sup> All but one organisation rely primarily if not solely on donations from individual Egyptians, many of which are given to the organisations during Ramadan, in the form of *zakat al-fitr*.<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, revenues from activities such as attendee fees

<sup>75</sup> For a discussion of the beneficiaries of Muslim organisations in Egypt, see e.g. Clark 2004.

<sup>76</sup> As pointed out by several recent studies (e.g. Daly 2004, CIVICUS 2007), the public entrust religious organisations in particular with their money.

<sup>77</sup> Zakat al-fitr is a duty on every Muslim to pay a share of his or her wealth immediately after the holy month of Ramadan to bless his or her fast (Daly 2004: 55).

or revenue from the sale of second-hand clothes represent an important income for these organisations. However, most activities do not require large funds. All organisations rely almost solely on voluntary labour; only half of them have salaried staff, and in most cases these constitute only a minority of the total number of participants. Besides, what the organisations need in materials (e.g. food, clothes, books, etc.) is often given to them as donations. In fact, these organisations receive many in-kind donations, and because of the many restrictions and extensive bureaucratic procedures related to all monetary aid, some organisations even prefer in-kind donations to in-cash donations.

In the following pages, I will explore the group of religiously-oriented youth organisations further. While looking at various aspects of discourses and practices, I attempt to answer questions such as: Why and how do the organisations engage in social welfare and human development activities? Who is the primary group of participants? What is the relationship of these organisations to the state? What is the role of religion in all this? And finally, do they represent a new movement in Egyptian civil society?

### **3.3 Islam, development and voluntarism: solutions for society**

Usually, participants in movements and organisations direct their work towards the solution of certain problems, identified as the most pertinent in society (Benford and Snow 2000). In the youth organisations studied here, three types of problem were repeatedly named. The first has to do with the poor and unprivileged. Like other social welfare organisations, participants in the youth organisations see poverty and poverty-related problems such as illiteracy, unemployment and illnesses as the primary problems in Egyptian society. One of the female volunteers expressed a rather pessimistic view of the socio-economic situation in Egypt:

If we start counting the problems in society, we will not finish today. There are educational problems, health problems, poverty problems, environmental problems. Some families seem fine, but when you go to their homes, you will see that they are in desperate need for help.

Several participants pointed out that problems of poverty, illiteracy, unemployment and illness should be addressed by the state, which they blamed for not living up to its responsibilities in serving the needs of the population through the provision of basic services. One board member put it this way: “Why has this happened?

From my point of view it is because of the reluctance of the government to do something for society”. However, several people added that it is not solely the responsibility of the state and society. The individual needs to take responsibility of his or her own life. This is especially the case when it comes to young people. According to many, young people have the opportunity to change their situation and take responsibility for their own lives instead of just relying on the support of their family.

The second problem identified by the participants has to do precisely with the present state of Egyptian youth. First of all, for the majority of young people prospects for the future are bleak, and there is a lack of job opportunities for young graduates from higher education institutes, colleges and universities. Many young people complain that they are not able to gain economic independence from their parents and create families of their own due to a lack of income opportunities. One of the reasons for this is that the graduates’ qualifications do not match those required in most private companies, and for most young people employment in the public sector is not considered an option, primarily due to the extremely low salaries. This is particularly critical for young people from the lower and middle strata of the middle classes. Unlike the upper middle class and the elite, they cannot afford private universities and do not have the connections necessary to obtain access to jobs in the private sector.

A related problem is the state of indifference and apathy among Egyptian youth. According to several participants, young Egyptians are not participating in or contributing to society. “Our youth waste time doing nothing instead of helping their society”, as one board member put it. This criticism was especially directed at educated and resourceful young people from the middle and upper classes. One female volunteer in Sama noted: “When people go through their career, they don’t do anything to help other people. But when you’re young, you have the energy.” The young people themselves are to blame for this situation, but at the same time, the “system” and the older generation are seen as excluding them from society.

The third problem identified by the participants concerns beliefs and values. According to many, there is a general lack of religious ethics and morals in society. Religion is constantly being misunderstood, and people are not aware of the true meaning of Islam. When they look around, the young people see a society that does not comply with the precepts of Islam. A male volunteer from Suna’ al-Hayah put it this way:

It is well known that we in Egypt are not mature enough. You see it in the streets and how people are driving. [...] Also, there are no borders between girls and boys, and this doesn't comply with Islam. The same is true as regards relations with girls, smoking cigarettes and using drugs. [...] They are not following the book. We want to inspire people around us with these ideas.

The participants want to "inspire people" to follow the religious instructions. This goes for poor people, the beneficiaries of their projects, as well as for other young people. According to the president of one of the organisations, Egyptian youth need religious role models. Everyday life and experiences are not addressed properly by the sheikhs and imams of religious institutions in Egypt.

I want the youth to see some role models, because we as a country lack the models. I am not judging anyone, but the role models are not good enough. They might be very good at preaching in the mosque, but when they go out it is like they are disconnected. What I'm trying to do is this "out". We deal with the Islamic trails but we do not preach them.

In sum, the overall mission of the youth organisations in this study is two-fold but intertwined: They aim to assist poor and underprivileged people in Egyptian society, and they wish to engage young Egyptians in this process. Furthermore, they identify a general lack of religious ethics and morals, which is one of the reasons for problems facing Egyptian society today. Three solutions to these problems are put forward: i) a combination of Islam and social welfare; ii) youth voluntarism; and iii) the creation of a new role model combining Islamic values and behaviour with modern ideas of management. What all of these solutions have in common is an insistence on Islam as an important frame and guideline.

### *3.3.1 Islam and social welfare*

In the youth organisations I studied, Islam was articulated as closely connected with charity, good deeds and social justice. According to participants, Islamic concepts such as zakat, sadaqa and thawab<sup>78</sup> provide the general guidelines for achieving social justice. By giving part of one's wealth to the poor through zakat and sadaqa, privileged Muslims are able to help less privileged groups in society, thus contributing to a fairer distribution of wealth and resources. In return they will receive the appropriate rewards from God, or thawab, in this life and in their afterlife. This behaviour was

<sup>78</sup> See Chapter 2 for further information on and discussion of these concepts.

often illustrated by stories about the Prophet Muhammad. Like more traditional Muslim social welfare organisations, the youth organisations see it as their role to channel wealth from the rich (including themselves) to the poor in society through zakat and sadaqa.

But Islam has more to offer than that: it also provides the framework and guidelines for the implementation of concrete activities aimed at helping the poor and underprivileged. Many highlighted the deeds of the Prophet. As a board member in Bayan put it: “I’m trying to get to the heart of the hadith and implement it.” Furthermore, some of the organisations have activities with a profound religious content, though such activities are definitely fewer than in more traditional Muslim welfare organisations. One example is Alashanik Ya Baladi’s programme “Ethics and Morals”, which targets poor women in the neighbourhoods of Old Cairo and in which the organisation “offers various religious programs to elevate the ethics and morals of the community”<sup>79</sup>, including among other things, teaching of the Quran, explanations of Quranic verses and stories and actions of the Prophet. One female volunteer explained the purpose of the programme as giving the women “a deeper understanding of Islam – how to treat others”. According to participants in several organisations, many poor people are ignorant and do not know the true Islam. By being good role models and telling others about Islam and the right ethical and moral behaviour, young people believe that problems related to the lack of religious ethics and morals will lessen. Furthermore, poverty will decrease, because people will take more responsibility for their own and their families’ lives.

Poverty and poverty-related problems are addressed by a large percentage of Egypt’s civil society organisations. The many social welfare organisations, including the large group of religious organisations, offer services for the poor and underprivileged. However, according to many of the young people engaged in the youth organisations, many of these efforts are not effective enough. One reason is that most organisations in Egypt have a purely charitable approach and as such “just fulfil the needs of people” without searching for the roots of the problems.<sup>80</sup> Instead, the young people argue for a more development-oriented approach, replacing the traditional and short-term

<sup>79</sup> [www.ayb-sd.org](http://www.ayb-sd.org)

<sup>80</sup> This argument is supported by a recent study of civil society in Egypt. Although there has been a general move from charity to development, most civil society organisations in Egypt have a conventional top-down charity approach to poverty alleviation (CIVICUS 2006: 64). My visits to more traditional Muslim social welfare organisations confirmed this finding. While some organisations, mainly larger ones like the Mahmoud Mosque Association, have recently started supplementing their charity projects with projects of a more development-oriented approach, such as micro-finance and vocational training, most small-scale Muslim social welfare organisations are engaged in traditional almsgiving and basic service provision.



almsgiving and service provision with longer term achievements and self-sustainability for the people involved. One male volunteer in Misr Shoryan al-Ata'a stressed the difference between traditional charitable activities and activities of a more developmental character, such as those of most new youth organisations:

Charity is just fulfilling the needs of people who are in need, like people who don't have a stable financial situation, people who need care, either medical or social – they are fulfilling it, without any idea of the origin of that need and what are the problems. The other level, the sustainable development concept, is searching for the reason. Why are these people in need?

For the participants in the youth organisations, charitable activities are not enough to solve the problems facing Egyptian society. Some went so far as saying that "charity is creating passive communities", as the president of Zedny put it. According to almost all the participants I talked to, there is a need for another approach aimed at longer term and sustainable development. However, they did not always have the same understanding of the concept of development. Some pointed to the physical environment of the people. For example, the chairman of Misr Shoryan al-Ata'a conceptualised development as "improving the environment – that is living standards, sewage systems, employment opportunities and standards of schools". But the majority stressed that development is more about changing people's minds and self-understanding: "When the humans understand that they don't need the charity – that is development". There seemed to be general agreement over the positive connotations of phrases such as capacity-building and sustainable development. More specifically, board members and volunteers mentioned vocational training, micro-finance and human capital development as some of the activities that foster longer term development.

Islam was often used to justify an approach based on development rather than charity by referring to stories about the Prophet or to Amr Khaled's ideas of "faith-based development" (see below). But proverbs from other cultural contexts, such as the Chinese, were also used to emphasise and explain why development is the right approach. In the statement below, the Muslim duty to help the needy is combined with a Chinese proverb to justify a development-oriented approach to social welfare:

I believe in the Chinese proverb: "Don't give a man a fish, but teach him how to fish." Charity delivers the stuff, but it doesn't teach. You only help people stay the same way and not improve. But I do charity during Ramadan. In Islam you have to do charity. But Islam also says that you have to find the

neediest family and help him in the best way – not just with money, but to teach him how to build his life.

In practice, many of the activities carried out by the youth organisations are development-oriented, especially when compared to the majority of other religiously oriented social welfare organisations. Health and environmental awareness campaigns, vocational training programmes, micro-finance activities and human development courses are examples of some of these activities. One organisation, Zedny, even tries to spread and propagate the development approach among more traditional social welfare organisations through a so-called NGO Club, in which organisations are trained in how to plan, manage and carry out projects and activities. The president explained their aim with such activities this way:

We are trying to push the NGOs to work in development – even if it is charity. Even if it is charity, we can transform all the charity projects to be development projects. It is not necessary to do one hundred percent development projects, but the development elements should be in the charity projects.

But according to many participants, activities of a more developmental character are often more difficult to organise and implement. For volunteers with no training or experience in the field, charity activities, such as distributions of clothes and food or the provision of basic medical services, are a lot easier to carry out. Conversely, activities of a more developmental character require both knowledge and training. Furthermore, development projects are often met with scepticism by the beneficiaries. In the following extract, a female volunteer in Zedny reproduces what she claimed is a common discussion between volunteers and beneficiaries: “If you go to someone and tell her: ‘I am going to make a project and you are going to work in the project and earn your own money and not just wait for us to come and give you money’, she will say: ‘No, I don’t have the time, I don’t have the energy. Just give me the money.’”

Though obviously sometimes difficult in practice, the participants seemed to be very aware of not reproducing traditional patterns of patronage between giver and receiver. Instead, they emphasised respect and equality when talking about their beneficiaries. One example is the second-hand clothes exhibition project run by many of the organisations. Instead of giving out the clothes for free, the organisations involved in this activity have decided to sell the clothes to poor people at a very favourable price. One female volunteer from Boraq justified this approach: “We collect used clothes

and sell them to poor people for a low price. Why don't we just give it to them? We want to give people the opportunity to choose what they like – feeling that he or she is buying like any other normal person." Furthermore, many participants used words such as "development" and "empowerment" when talking about the beneficiaries of their projects and activities, and they seemed to agree that the individual should always be the starting point of every effort. Instead of just providing basic services, the youth organisations aim to help people to break out of their poverty by changing their attitudes: "We need to change the way people think. We need to change them from sitting and waiting for someone with a solution to trying to create their own solution for their own problems. [...] We want to change the people themselves, the way they think." However, sometimes the focus on changing individuals' attitudes and ways of thinking had a patronising ring to it: "When dealing with the [poor] people, we notice if they are behaving particularly badly [so] we bring knowledgeable people to tell them more about life and religion."

Despite all the talk of long-term and sustainable development, many of the participants agreed that Egyptian society needs both charity and development. In fact, many of the new youth organisations also engage in traditional charity activities similar to those carried out by other social welfare organisations. Examples of such activities are the provision of health services, the distribution of food bags among people in poor areas and the sale of second-hand clothes. During my fieldwork, I participated in some of these charitable activities. One was the so-called Clothes Exhibition Project mentioned earlier, an activity carried out by several of the organisations. This particular event took place in the poor neighbourhood of *Ezbet El Hagana* in the outskirts of Cairo. Before the actual clothes sale, the organisation had spent months collecting, sorting and cleaning clothes that had been donated to the organisation by individual Egyptians. The following passage is an excerpt from my field notes that day:

Mohamed and I followed the truck through Nasr City and towards Ezbet El Hagana. What we saw was one of Cairo's many poor suburbs. The streets were not paved. And everywhere dogs were rooting for food in the many piles of garbage. Most of the houses looked half-finished and none of them were plastered or painted.

A large room, part of a mosque-related social welfare organisation, was the place where the exhibition was going to be held. The building was buzzing with activity; people, and especially children, were running up and down the stairs. On the second floor, a group of about fifteen girls were reciting

the Quran together with a woman from the local organisation. When we arrived, people from the local organisation were already there ready to help unpacking and arranging the clothes. One of the young girls from Mazeed showed me how to arrange the bags, and instructed me about prices and what to say to the customers. She informed me that prices were fixed – three pounds for one bag.

When everything was ready, the people of the neighbourhood were let into the room. They had been waiting since we arrived behind a barrier at the entrance put up by the people from the local organisation. In groups of about twenty they were let into the room. Most were women with their children. They rushed to the tables and stands, searching through the piles of clothes and shoes. Each group were allowed to stay in the room for about twenty minutes, before a young woman, dressed in black from top to toe, shouted from the middle of the room that now they had to pay and leave the room. Then the next group was let in. It went on like this for more than three hours.

To be sure, the young people who were involved in projects like the one described above seemed to be very aware of the limitations of such activities, which they realise will not contribute to long-term and sustainable development. Instead, they seek to meet some of the basic needs of poor people in Egypt. Thus, for most participants, charitable activities are seen as part of a much broader strategy to change individuals and society. Most effectively, poverty should be fought through empowerment of the individual, including education, vocational training and moral strengthening.

### ***3.3.2 Youth and voluntarism***

A second solution to the problems identified by the youth organisations is using youth as a resource. Here the concept of voluntarism is introduced. In an interview, a male employee in Resala presented it this way:

You have to spread awareness among youth – help society within itself. I wish to spread the essence and the idea of voluntarism – all over the country and maybe in the rest of the world. The idea is that anybody is able to receive the help from his or her home. Later this person will volunteer. It's about solidarity – making everybody volunteer. We should make a fixed time for volunteering, like we have a fixed time for prayer. Then nobody will be in need of help and not find it. He will find people – just across the street.

According to him and many of the other participants, it is possible to solve or at least contribute to solving both poverty-related problems and problems of indifference and apathy among young people by involving them especially in voluntary activities. Furthermore, many of the participants agreed that there are many advantages in relying on a voluntary workforce instead of salaried staff. “Volunteers somehow do it better. [...] So why should we pay for human effort that people are ready to exert to please God?”, as the president of Resala rhetorically asked in his recruitment speech to potential new volunteers. According to him, volunteers do a better job because they “do this work from their heart, so it reaches the hearts of its recipients”. Later on, he gave an example of their work with orphans:

Imagine the impact on him [an orphanage child] when he finds people that truly love him and call themselves his brothers and sisters – people who take care of him, visit him and take him out. Do you think those would have a better effect if they were volunteers or if they took some monetary compensation for it? They **MUST** be volunteers! The child won’t be truly convinced that they love him unless they are volunteers.

The very large proportion of volunteers among the participants is one of the factors distinguishing the youth organisations from other civil society organisations, religious or not.<sup>81</sup> Many organisations do not have any salaried staff. Others have a handful or even fewer to take care of routine organisational and financial tasks.<sup>82</sup> In fact, a voluntary workforce is the foundation of these youth organisations. And naturally the leaders of the organisations try to make the volunteers’ conditions as good as possible. The head of one of Resala’s branches put it this way: “Here we use the youth and open the doors for them. Our environment makes it easier for them. Other NGOs don’t have the space. We have space and we are expanding. We have phones so the volunteers can call the families. You develop yourself to be able to do your job better.” All the board members I talked to saw this organisational structure, with many volunteers, as one of the major strengths characterising the new youth organisations. The voluntary aspect of participation entails that no one is there for the money and very few for the prestige alone, in contrast to other organisations in which staff are there solely because of the salary and the prestige. According to a board member of one of the more traditional Muslim social welfare organisations,

<sup>81</sup> A high percentage of Egyptian civil society organisations rely entirely or partially on paid staff; very few rely entirely on volunteers (Clark 2004: 62).

<sup>82</sup> See Table II, Annex D, for participants and beneficiaries.

this is actually a widespread problem. As she sees it, since such organisations do not serve society, they are inactive and useless.

However, several board members acknowledged that there are some disadvantages in not having permanent staff in the organisation. First of all, many of the volunteers are students or have a full-time job besides their work in the organisation. Naturally, there is a maximum number of hours they can spend in the organisations, and especially during exam periods in the universities, most organisations have a serious lack of hands. Furthermore, volunteers are not always one hundred percent reliable; many volunteers participate in one or two activities, after which they either try another organisation or stop doing voluntary work at all. Finally, many leaders acknowledge that some volunteers lack the necessary experience and qualifications. A few organisations offer basic training to new volunteers, but in most organisations, they just watch and learn from the others. This means that activities cannot be too sophisticated but must be relatively easy to carry out.

According to all the participants I talked to, however, the advantages of relying on volunteers instead of paid staff by far exceed the disadvantages. Furthermore, voluntarism was seen as the right thing to do, because it helps involve young people in society and makes social welfare work more cost-effective, as well as more sincere.

### ***3.3.3 Islam, management theories and role models***

Apart from activities aimed at assisting and helping poor people at the community level, many youth organisations also engage in what can be termed human and career development courses. While the engagement in social welfare activities is motivated by a wish to fight poverty in general, the organisations carry out human and career development courses because they want to solve more youth-specific problems such as unemployment, apathy and the poor quality of higher education.

Two organisations, Zedny and Bayan, specialise in this field. Through up-to-date courses in human and career development offered at an affordable price, their mission is to prepare young people, especially students and graduates, for their professional careers and adult lives. Highly respected university professors and successful managers in multinational companies teach courses in topics such as leadership, coaching, problem-solving, time management, and presentation and communication skills.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>83</sup> For further information on the courses offered by Zedny and Bayan, see [www.zedny.org](http://www.zedny.org) and [www.bayan-online.org](http://www.bayan-online.org).

Whereas in Zedny the aim is to reach as many young people as possible and several hundred young people are often taught in the same course, in Bayan they prefer workshops and therefore only teach groups of between twenty and thirty.

Both organisations have professionally designed websites in both Arabic and English which provide information on the organisations' background, mission and vision, activities, board members, etc. The courses are clearly influenced by North American management theories, and the chairman of Zedny claims that the organisation is "managed like any multinational company", using tools and concepts such as "strategic objectives and directions", "brand manual" and "outcome". But management theories are not the only source of inspiration. On Zedny's website, for instance, a diverse range of celebrities and legends are also quoted, including North American sports stars, politicians and writers, as well as historical legends and philosophers such as Gandhi and Aristotle.

It is significant that, at least at first sight, neither Zedny nor Bayan seem to make any reference to Islam and their religious identity. However, in talking to the participants it becomes obvious that Islam does play a significant role in the practices and discourses of these organisations. In fact, Islam and modern management are seen as mutually reinforcing, and religious commitment and practice is expected of members of and volunteers in the organisations. On a very concrete level, the organisations make sure to leave time for common religious prayers and lectures in an otherwise tight schedule. "It's something natural to pray together, to refresh our minds with something related to our ideology", as the president of Zedny put it. Also, both organisations practice gender segregation in their courses: "We're trying to keep to the rules, and we're proud of it", one member said.

Furthermore, through the introduction of the ideal of a so-called 'Muslim professional', the practices and strategies of an effective businessman is seen to complement rather than contrast with the values and morals of a good Muslim. A Muslim professional is someone who dresses in the right way, works efficiently and has high moral standards. The lecturers and board members act as role models for the volunteers and the young people attending the courses, thus promoting this ideal of the Muslim professional. The following statement from a board member in Bayan illustrates this approach:

My point of view is that we don't need to speak about Islam on how to do and what to do. We need to act. We need to show the other face – be good role models. So we try not to preach to people but to do something. We

don't talk, we do. [...] We deal with the Islamic trails but we don't preach them. For example, appointments: When I say that the lecture starts at six, at six-O-one you are late. When I say that you have to attend three out of four lectures to pass, if you only attend two, you have failed. There are no excuses. This is what it takes to be a Muslim professional. [...] We influence the behaviour by acting as role models.

Undoubtedly, the young volunteers and attendees see the slightly older people who manage to combine a successful career with being good and active Muslims as role models. Wickham (2004:238-9) refers to this as "the efficiency" of agents or "social carriers" in social movements. The lecturers and board members in organisations such as Zedny and Bayan are able to act as role models for the young people, partly due to the recent decades of de-monopolisation of the authority to interpret sacred texts, and partly due to the fact that they speak from a similar socio-economic background.

The kind of religion communicated to the young people is not so much concerned with rituals and theological doctrine. Instead, Islam is the underlying motivation and what provides the general guidelines for the modern individual, whether it concerns major choices in life or daily interaction with friends, family and business partners. If understood and practised in the right way, Islam will help the individual achieve his or her goals in life and become an active and useful participant in society.

### **3.4 Islam, individual empowerment and change**

The foregoing pages have explored the rationale, strategies and activities of the organisations. It is now time to turn towards the people implementing these. In the following pages, I will take a closer look at the group of participants and the motivations for their involvement. In particular, I will explore the role of Islam in this.

#### ***3.4.1 Participants***

Usually four categories of participants are found in the youth organisations being considered here, namely board members, ordinary members, employees and volunteers.<sup>84</sup> All the participants are young people in their 20s or 30s, and almost all are college students or recent graduates of public or private universities in Cairo. The vast majority of the participants belong to the upper strata of the middle class. Their educational backgrounds often reflect the activities and approach of the particular

<sup>84</sup> See Table II, Annex D, for more information on this.



organisation. Some organisations, such as Misr Shoryan al-Ata'a, offer services within the field of health care, and naturally many of the volunteers are students and graduates of medicine. Others recruit volunteers from all possible educational backgrounds. Usually, board members have been in the organisation for a long time – they might even be its founders. Therefore, they are often slightly older than the average volunteer – usually in their late 20s or early 30s – and many of them have a professional career besides their work in the organisations. However, when compared to board members in civil society organisations in general, they are still extremely young. According to a survey of 60 civil society organisations conducted by AbdelRahman (2004:158), 74 percent of all board members are over 50 years old.

Women constitute a very large part of the groups of volunteers and ordinary members. In the organisations studied, they make up minimum of 65 percent of the volunteers, and in some organisations close to 90 percent (e.g. Alashanik Ya Baladi). In fact, several board members remarked that young women participate more regularly in the activities of the organisations, and many of them described the female volunteers as “more dedicated” and “responsible towards problems in society”. This is something that distinguishes the youth organisations from many older and more traditional Muslim social welfare organisations, as well as from civil society organisations in general, where women are often not as well represented. According to a recent study, there is a serious gender gap in Egyptian civil society organisations. In a nationwide survey of 1,048 civil society organisations, men's membership was twice that of women. Also, women are more likely to be members of organisations engaged in conventional mother-child care service (CIVICUS 2006:28). This argument was supported by the Egyptian researcher Abdel Ghafar Shukr, who was interviewed during my fieldwork. According to him, the people in charge of the organisations do not think that women should become involved in such organisations unless their work is concerned with children or other women.<sup>85</sup>

Women make up a large proportion of mid-level management, working as team leaders, coordinators and PR persons in the youth organisations. However, they are not as well-represented in the leadership as one might think. Apart from Alashanik Ya Baladi, in which seven out of ten seats on the board are held by women, and Suna'a

<sup>85</sup> Another general feature of the group of people engaged in the new youth organisations – educated upper middle class young people with an over-representation of women – is also that they match the target group of lay preachers like Amr Khaled. According to a study conducted in 2006 by the American University in Cairo, Amr Khaled is making a deeper impact on young women than on young men in Arab societies (Taylor 2007).

al-Hayah, where women have three out of seven seats, women constitute a much smaller proportion of the boards in the other organisations.<sup>86</sup> The same pattern is found more generally among civil society organisations in Egypt (CIVICUS 2006:29), and the gender gap is even larger when it comes to more traditional Muslim social welfare organisations. However, people in the youth organisations seem intent on changing the situation. Several of the board members acknowledged the importance of having women in the leadership, for example, in Boraq: “We decided that the board always must have a female representative. It is important that the decisions suit the girls. Situations are sometimes difficult for girls, and someone must always think of their situation.”

While there did not seem to be any restrictions on the kinds of people who were recruited as volunteers in or ordinary members of the organisations, it was different as regards board members. At least in Bayan, commitment to the objectives of the organisation, as well as the person’s religious values and behaviour, seemed to be of great importance when the leadership was looking for new board members:

We do very strict interviews. It is not left to just wanting to be a member. [...] The interviews are based not on ability but on the willingness to do something for the society. If they have the willingness, they will definitely have the ability. And some very good behaviours. For example, one of the very good things I ask for is whether they pray the *fajr*,<sup>87</sup> because I think that this shows if he is willing or not.

Most volunteers, male and female, had learned about the organisation and its activities through personal networks or campaigns in the universities. When they came to the organisations for the first time, it was often together with friends or colleagues who were to a greater or lesser extent already involved in the organisation. Since their establishment, many of the youth organisations have experienced a great interest in their work, and compared to older and more traditional charities they have a very large number of volunteers. Therefore, it is particularly interesting to look at why young people engage in these organisations. In other words, what are their motivations for participation? And from the perspective of the board members of the organisations, how are new volunteers and members recruited?

<sup>86</sup> E.g. in Zedny and Bayan all the board members are male, and in Boraq only one out of ten seats is held by a woman.

<sup>87</sup> The early morning prayer, conducted in the period between dawn and sunrise.

### *3.4.2 Motivations for involvement*

By engaging in social welfare activities, the young people are not only trying to empower the poor – by default they are also empowering themselves. Almost all the young people said that their involvement in social welfare activities had strengthened their skills in areas such as project planning, management and communication – skills that might be of great importance when it comes to job opportunities. And the leadership was aware of this as an important motivation for volunteering. One female member of Bayan put it as follows: “We not only develop the people we help, but also the people working with us. The volunteers develop skills.”

The social aspect of the work in the organisations is another important motivation for the young people. Many pointed to the social environment and the feeling of belonging and intimacy with the other members and volunteers. One female volunteer in Zedny put it this way:

You can also enjoy your time. There are many people to know, you have many experiences to gain. There are many older people who have the patience to teach everyone, like Dr Mohamed and all the board members. For any young female or male, they will find themselves in a very rich environment in many things.

Female participation was explained by most male and some female participants as a consequence of their abundance of free time, compared to young men who have to earn money and prepare for their wedding: “I think that the reason is that girls and females have more time to spend. Boys are always looking for the jobs to gain money to start building their future. The women have more time. That’s why they can go and help in society. They don’t have to work in a profit organisation.” Furthermore, it is considered more respectful for women to work in a Muslim social welfare organisation than to have a job where they have to mix with the opposite sex. This is particularly true when it comes to upper middle and upper class women. Due to their families’ secure economic situations, they are often not required to take a job after graduation.

These examples all illustrate the rather tangible benefits of participation. They point to personal gain and interest as the motivational factors. But in interviews, many of the participants often stressed a more normative basis for their actions, pointing to a religious obligation and/or a responsibility to contribute to the change or development of their country. This normative aspect of the rationale for participation is

also what the president of Resala referred to in his recruitment speech to potential volunteers:

Some people think that those volunteers volunteer because they have lots and lots of free time to spend. On the contrary, we don't volunteer because we have time to fill, we volunteer because that's the right thing that should be done. Volunteerism is the right thing to do in all standards, it is correct religiously, it is correct patriotically, and it is correct in humanitarian terms. [...] So from all the perspectives, religious, patriotic, or even humanitarian, this is the right thing that should be done. And one who doesn't do it is mistaken, and should ask himself why he doesn't do it.

For the vast majority of the young people I talked to, religious obligation was the initial motivation for their involvement in social welfare activities. "Generally we all work to please God", as the chairman of Misr Shoryan al-Ata'a put it. Other phrases, such as "I do voluntary work because it is obligatory" or "it is something that religion requires us to do", illustrate the same religious obligation as an essential motivational factor for volunteering. Many of the young people I interviewed even quoted the Quran or the hadiths to underline their message. Referring to a specific passage in the Quran, the president of Resala described two sins that result in a person going to hell: not believing in God, and refraining from providing food for the needy. And many of the volunteers actually experienced themselves becoming better Muslims in the process of doing community work. One male volunteer in Suna'a al-Hayah put it this way: "We were not all oriented towards helping ourselves, but were focused in helping others. In the process, we found out that we became better Muslims. We thought we were already good Muslims." The female participants were often seen as more religious than the young men, which, according to some people, is the main reason why they engage in religiously motivated charitable and development work.

The leadership also use Islam to recruit and motivate the young people. In Zedny, for example, a person from the religious establishment is sometimes invited to talk to the volunteers about Islam and why voluntary activities should be taken up: "Just to motivate people to go", as the president put it. Another way to motivate the young people was to talk about the possible rewards given by God. In return for paying zakat and/or doing voluntary work to help the poor, Muslims believe that they receive rewards from God, or thawab. They can come in this life or the next, and the rewards materialise in everything from rather tangible things, such as wealth and professional success, to more intangible things, such as improved health, fertility or

merely happiness. In his recruitment speech to potential volunteers, the president of Resala gave several examples of how volunteers in his organisation had been rewarded by God. One had been given a pay rise the day after he volunteered for the first time. Another no longer suffered from migraine. And a third suddenly became pregnant after several years of trying.

For many of the participants, however, involvement in the organisations is more than a religious obligation, and certainly more than collecting thawab to ensure one's own place in Paradise: it is about developing and changing the society and the country. Inspired by Amr Khaled, some even said that they wish to contribute to a renaissance of the Arab and Muslim world.<sup>88</sup> "Our goal is to work together toward a promising future, and our achievements would be changing our country to a better place", is what is written on the website of Zedny.<sup>89</sup> Along similar lines, the slogan of Alashanik Ya Baladi is "The path for a better country".<sup>90</sup> The young people want to take part in and contribute to the development of their country. They want to take part in building the foundation of their future and the future of Egyptian young people in general. "We cannot wait for others to come and build this future", as the president of one of the newly established organisations put it. And he continued: "Our slogan is 'Our Future, Our Decision!'" While most talked about a change or development of society in general terms without describing more specifically how this society should be organised and governed, one board member stressed that in his opinion the organisation was striving for the establishment of a society in which Islam would play a greater role. In his words, they "are trying to do something so that one day Islam will lead the country". These statements might be expressions of what Bayat (2007) terms "nativism". According to Bayat, in Egypt religious loyalty has not replaced nationalist sentiment. On the contrary, Islam and nationalism are combined, mutually strengthening each other.

People in the leadership in particular emphasised a wish to contribute to the change or development of the country as a motivation for their participation in the organisation. But due to the political climate in the country, involvement in any kind of political activism is very risky. In other words, social welfare activities are the only possibility for young people who do not want to risk a confrontation with the state authorities. And the young people were very aware of that: "Our mission is to help build the society, changing a lot of circumstances that people are living under. [...]"

<sup>88</sup> [www.amrkhaled.net](http://www.amrkhaled.net)

<sup>89</sup> [www.zedny.org](http://www.zedny.org)

<sup>90</sup> [www.ayb-sd.org](http://www.ayb-sd.org)

When you're concerned with these things, working in a NGO is the only window", as one female volunteer put it. According to the Egyptian researcher and activist Heba Raouf Ezzet, young women especially choose this kind of civic engagement rather than involvement in direct political activities, such as protests and demonstrations. Thus, involvement in social welfare activities might be a way for some young women to gain a sense of contributing to social and political change in society without running the risk of disgracing themselves and their families.

Although only few people referred directly to Amr Khaled when discussing their motives for participating in the organisations, undoubtedly many of the young people were initially inspired by the ideas and concepts of faith-based development that he formulated in his TV programme *Suna'a al-Hayah* from 2004/2005. In this programme, Amr Khaled encouraged young people especially to develop themselves and their fellow citizens by actively participating in their communities. According to him, Islam is not only about praying five times a day and wearing the hijab the correct way, and da'wa is not simply a call to live by these rules. Islam is about improving yourself and your community, and da'wa is a call for engagement and social reform. As he put it himself, he wanted "to encourage our men and women, both young and old, to have effective and beneficial roles in serving our country."<sup>91</sup> Awareness campaigns on drugs and smoking, as well as the collection and distribution of food and second-hand clothes in poor areas, were some of the projects suggested by Amr Khaled and carried out by young people.<sup>92</sup>

Among scholars, not everybody thinks that Amr Khaled has a positive impact on Egyptian youth. The following statement is one Egyptian researcher's rather critical analysis of Amr Khaled and his target group, upper middle-class youth:

He is the symbol of a young Muslim from the upper middle class, who can still do everything – go abroad, wear fashionable clothes and have a relationship with girls. He has thousands of young followers who can't find other leaders. He plays under the umbrella of religious culture, which is horrible. And he made a very good business. [...] It is suitable for the upper middle class youth. It gives them peace inside. It is like a policeman giving a person a license to drive. And he is intelligent and smart looking.

<sup>91</sup> [www.amrkhaled.net](http://www.amrkhaled.net)

<sup>92</sup> [www.amrkhaled.net](http://www.amrkhaled.net)

According to him, Amr Khaled's messages might give this particular group of young people "peace inside", but they also pacify them. This is without doubt an important aspect of the discussion of the phenomenon of Amr Khaled and other lay preachers like him. And, as many scholars and journalists have pointed out, Amr Khaled is not a liberal Muslim thinker. "His sermons, [...] with their clear and vivid warnings of the hell-fire that awaits unbelievers, appear to be just another form of fear mongering" (Atia 2005). According to Bayat (2007:153), some of Amr Khaled's ideas are highly conservative and his methods manipulative. But like others who have commented on the influence of Amr Khaled on Egyptian youth, these critics do not mention the many young people who, inspired by Amr Khaled's TV programme, *Suna'a al-Hayah*, started engaging in voluntary social welfare work.

### **3.5 The new youth organisations and the state**

So far the analysis has dealt with the rationale, strategies and activities of the organisations, as well as with those who are implementing these and their motivations for doing so. It is now time to consider more closely the context in which the organisations operate, in particular, what is the relationship of the organisations to the state, and how much room for manoeuvre do they actually have?

Generally speaking, the government has an ambivalent relationship with many Muslim social welfare organisations. On the one hand, it fears that these organisations are supporting the Muslim Brotherhood or other political Islamic movements against the regime in one way or another.<sup>93</sup> And, even if these organisations have no connections with such Islamic political actors, they still "offer concrete, visible examples of what Islam can provide, in contradistinction to the state's secular modernization failures" (Wiktorowicz 2004:11), which make them a threat to the legitimacy of the government. On the other hand, the government is very much aware of the fact that Muslim social welfare organisations provide good and much needed services to the poor, a task the government is unable to solve by itself. This ambivalent relationship is very much reflected in the regime's stance vis-à-vis the different kinds of civil society organisations. According to AbdelRahman (2004:114), "the regime wished to

<sup>93</sup> Because of the general status of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, as well as some of the new youth organisations' reservations towards myself and my research project, I abstained from asking questions about the relationship between the Muslim youth organisations and the Muslim Brotherhood or other Islamic political actors. However, it is my impression that few if any of these organisations had links to Islamic political actors. This observation is supported by several scholars in the field, for example Bayat (2007: 14), who emphasises that, "contrary to the common perception, Islamic social welfare organizations in Egypt are not sites of Islamist political activity. They simply act as service organizations. The vast majority have no link to political Islam as such."

neutralize the power of Islamic NGOs by attempting to co-opt those with no strong political inclinations, while subjecting the more politically active Islamic NGOs, for example *Al-Gama'aa Al-Shara'ia*, to its most extreme measure of scrutiny.”

In practice, the government often uses the NGO law as a way to restrict the power and influence of Muslim social welfare organisations that are considered to be a threat. Apart from control over most of the financial resources available to organisations, the government has the power to block individuals from competing in board elections on unspecified grounds, to dissolve organisations without the need for a juridical order and to appoint up to 50 percent of the board members (Human Rights Watch cf. CIVICUS 2006:50, AbdelRahman 2005:129, 132-5). In order to avoid such consequences, as well as more general harassment by the government, Muslim social welfare organisations must accept two rather broad conditions. First of all, they must stay completely out of politics. According to the NGO law, the government has the power to dissolve organisations if they are involved in political activities. In fact, if a civil society organisation accepts this condition and refrains from carrying out political activities, other infringements of the law generally do not seem to disturb the government (Ibrahim et al. 1996). The participants I talked to were all very much aware of this condition. In an interview, the president of one of the youth organisations put this quite openly, and he assured me that they make this point clear to all the participants in the organisation:

We don't have political aspirations and we cannot have political aspirations. It is dangerous. If we had these aspirations, we would not have this meeting and we would not do all the work we do. [...] You will find groups who believe that it is their duty to do political work. But we cannot do this. And we are not a religious organisation. [...] We cannot work in politics. We know that it is dangerous. You have to avoid politics and religion. If you raise one of the two banners, you will not be allowed to work. We make sure that the whole organisation understands this. Politics is dangerous.

In this statement, he touches upon the second, rather implicit condition laid down by the government, namely that Islam should not be too visible in the organisation. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the term “Islamic”, initially intended to describe this group of religiously oriented civil society organisations, proved to be rather problematic. Several participants objected to this labelling. For many Egyptians, the term “Islamic” has connotations of this dangerous political field, and they fear punishment from the government if they raise the religious banner too high. Most social welfare organisa-



tions, including the youth organisations studied here, prefer to register under other categories than that of cultural, scientific and religious association, precisely because of the suspicion and harsher treatment that the state often reserves for Muslim organisations (AbdelRahman 2004:122). Below a male volunteer reflects on how many Muslim social welfare organisations handle this issue:

I think that most people working in charity and development are afraid to announce that they are Islamic. The government places restrictions on any group that has an Islamic name. I think that this make them say that their motives are not Islamic, but consciously or subconsciously they are aware that their real motives inside them are Islamic. They have a mission or a role in developing their society, but they are not willing to announce that their motives are Islamic. They are not comfortable to announce so after the incidents here in Egypt in the 80s and early 90s, when Islamic groups did some terrorism and something. I think that people have that idea that the government will restrict or even harm any groups that belong to Islam.

These circumstances are also significant when it comes to recruiting members and volunteers, as well as for the discourses internally in the organisations: “We are not used to talk about this [the role of Islam] – not because we fear it, but because we fear that people fear it. People appreciate it inside, but they are afraid of the political consequences. It is safer to talk about the social aspects rather than the religious ones.” According to one Egyptian journalist, only two kinds of organisation can maintain a good relationship with the state: secular organisations, and Muslim organisations that manage to stay completely out of politics.

However, by no means all participants expressed a solely negative view of the government and state authorities. The president of one organisation mentioned that his experiences with the Ministry of Social Affairs during the registration process were mainly positive. Despite a rather lengthy process, according to him the people in the Ministry were very helpful. Furthermore, some of the participants I talked to advocated greater communication and cooperation between the organisations and the government. They wanted the government to acquire a better impression of them and their work: “There has to be contact between us and the government. They have to understand what we are doing. There are many unprofessional people in the NGOs. Therefore the government gets a wrong impression of the NGOs.”

It seems that some of the youth organisations have a relatively good relationship with the state. Resala is one of them. At Resala's Mother's Day event in Cairo Stadium, the Egyptian Minister of Organisational Development delivered a speech commending the work of Resala. He ended his speech with the words: "Thank you Resala, thank you volunteers!" Resala was founded by rich people, and because of the huge donations it is able to attract from the public, it has succeeded in expanding beyond everybody's expectations. According to the Egyptian journalist cited above, they are now in a good position in which the government cannot touch them or stop them from growing. Furthermore, the organisation has proved that it is able to stay completely out of politics. However, according to the journalist Resala is an exception, and most organisations do in fact have a more problematic relationship with the regime.

Examples of this are organisations like Suna'a al-Hayah and to some extent Sama, which seem to have the most problematic relationships with the state. The main reason for this is their close link to Amr Khaled. The name Suna'a al-Hayah derives from Amr Khaled's TV programme on faith-based development mentioned before. The programme was a huge success with thousands of young people participating in the development projects. According to Amr Khaled, 1.4 million young people – 40 percent of them Egyptian – had participated in the projects by 2005 (Atia 2005). But long before these events, the Egyptian government had already started to fear the popularity of this new lay preacher. One participant described the reaction of the government in this way: "The government doesn't like it that we are doing something that they can't do. When Amr Khaled is on TV, he can gather more than five million people and make them do something. It frightens the government that he can affect that much. They fear that the masses will rise." In 2002 the Egyptian government allegedly forced Amr Khaled to leave Egypt, but he continued his increasingly popular shows from abroad. Another attempt by the government to contain the influence of Amr Khaled was to prohibit other organisations with the name Suna'a al-Hayah from registering either by shutting down those that had not yet registered. Sama is one organisation that had to work under another name. One male volunteer from one of the other organisations had this comment on the reaction of the government and the circumstances facing Suna'a al-Hayah organisations in Egypt: "It is not very smart to say that you are part of Suna'a al-Hayah. In Canada you can do it. In Egypt, most organisations inspired by Amr Khaled are working under another name. [...] The government here dislikes Amr Khaled. [...] It is not safe to say that you are part of Suna'a al-Hayah."

However, despite the circumstances described by some of the young people I talked to, some Suna'a al-Hayah organisations have managed to overcome the crackdown and continue their work. With more than 1,700 volunteers and a wide range of different activities, the organisation I studied is one of them. This organisation even received computers as a donation from the Ministry of Education, which could either be a sign of the government's approval of the organisation or an attempt by the government to influence or even co-opt it. Or it might just be that communication and coordination between the different ministries are not that effective.

Regardless of the harsh circumstances facing some of the youth organisations, all participants agreed that, for security reasons, there has to be some kind of control with civil society organisations. "The security dilemma is that the control prevents good things from being done and bad things from happening", as one male volunteer put it. Generally they seemed both confident and optimistic in talking about the possibilities for continuing and even expanding their work in Egypt.

### **3.6 Concluding remarks**

The group of religiously oriented youth organisations studied here represents an interesting new phenomenon in Egyptian civil society, among other things because they are engaging a new segment of the Egyptian population, the upper-middle class young people. Furthermore, they seem to interpret and use Islam differently than many of the more traditional Muslim social welfare organisations.

As has been described in the previous pages, these youth organisations combine conventional social welfare activities with a human development approach, as well as activities that are normally associated with advocacy and awareness-raising. Despite also being involved in traditional charity activities, such as the provision of food and clothing, they are strongly promoting a development-oriented approach to social welfare. In this approach, the empowerment and development of the individual beneficiaries is the primary goal, and this is best realised through activities such as awareness campaigns, vocational training and micro-finance activities. Furthermore, voluntary social welfare work among young people especially is presented as an important contribution to the solution of poverty-related problems, as well as to the widespread state of apathy among large segments of the younger generations. In fact, some organisations spend much time and energy mobilising young people to become more involved in their society and local communities. When it comes to youth-related problems, the youth organisations see it as essential to combine human

development courses and other management tools with the right religious behaviour. More specifically, they have introduced the ideal of a so-called Muslim professional which combines the practices and strategies of an effective businessman with the values and morals of a good Muslim.

Generally speaking, Islam plays an important role for the participants in these organisations. As this study has shown, Islam is what initially motivates many of the young people to engage in social welfare activities: to be a good Muslim is to do something for others. But, combined with secular ideas of development, Islam is also what provides the guidelines for how to do something for others. Poverty is not fought through the random distribution of zakat, but through individual empowerment and moral strengthening. Finally, by providing concrete benefits in terms of strengthened personal capacities, Islam is also what makes the young people keep doing something for others. Due to strict state control, however, participants are aware that they should not raise the religious banner too high, and some even felt restricted in how far they could display their religiosity because they feared government harassment.

That Islam is an important element in these new youth organisations is also visible in the alliances and relationships that the organisations are a part of. Aside from the group of religiously oriented youth organisations, there are a dozen of more secular-oriented youth organisations that carry out similar activities and have a similar approach of development and voluntarism.<sup>94</sup> But despite being aware of the existence of these similar organisations, none of the youth organisations in my study had any kind of cooperation with them. Instead, they preferred to cooperate with other organisations with a religious output, be it youth organisations or traditional social welfare organisations. Compared to other sectors of Egyptian civil society, cooperation, coordination and the exchange of ideas and experiences was fairly widespread among especially the leaderships of the new religiously oriented youth organisations, and to some extent they also cooperated with a handful of more traditional Muslim social welfare organisations. Furthermore, some of the volunteers were involved with more than one organisation at the time, which also contributed to this continuous exchange of ideas and experiences between the organisations. This lack of cooperation between the religiously oriented youth organisations and their secular counterparts, together with the existence of widespread cooperation and communication among

<sup>94</sup> Examples of these are the *Meshwar* Organisation for Community Development, *Nahdet El Mabrousa* and the Youth Organisation for Population and Development.

the former, also strengthens the image of these youth organisations as a movement rather than a series of isolated and independent entities.

As the above has shown, it is clear that Islam is one of the factors uniting this movement. However, the question remains of the kind of Islam we find in these youth organisations. Despite their alliances with some of the more traditional Muslim social welfare organisations, the understandings of Islam found in the two kinds of organisation do not always seem to concur. In some respects, the youth organisations might even be closer to their secular counterparts. The kind of religion communicated to the young people is not so much about rituals and theological doctrine. Instead, Islam is the underlying motivation and what provides the general guidelines for the modern individual. For the participants, Islam is primarily about how individuals treat each other and what goals and visions they set for themselves and the society that surrounds them. If understood and practised in the right way, Islam will help the individual to achieve his or her goals and become an active and useful citizen.

One of the reasons for this particular use and understanding of Islam is to be found in the organisations' distinct constituency – educated young people from the upper middle class. In many ways, recent decades have witnessed drastic changes in social and political realities for large sectors of the Egyptian population, including this group of privileged youth. Many of them were brought up in secular homes oriented more towards the West than the Arab or Muslim worlds. But recent years have experienced a decrease in the power and influence of the secular discourses in society. This is also the case with regard to these young people, who have instead been affected by the general Islamisation of society. Many girls have donned the veil, and an increasing number of young people from the upper middle class and the elite are now praying in mosques and in the universities' prayer halls, to mention just a few concrete manifestations of this development (Bayat 2007:147). Yet, the religiosity of this group of young people is different from that of the lower middle class and working-class youth. First of all, the political Islam of the Muslim Brotherhood and other political Islamic actors does not seem to appeal to the majority of these young people. Secondly, since many of them did not grow up with any particular religious understanding and practice, they are inclined to practice religion in a more syncretistic way, combining traditional Islamic practices and norms with Western ideas and concepts.

For this reason, lay preachers like Amr Khaled have exerted a strong appeal among these young people. He has managed to attract and even mobilise large numbers of them, precisely because of his focus on how Islam can be combined with a modern

life-style, but also because he gives voice and initiative to the young people. Although the new trend in religiosity might, as Bayat puts it, signify “a shift from Islamism as a political project to one concerned primarily with personal salvation, ethical enhancement, and self-actualization” (Bayat 2007:149), some of the young people – among them the participants in the new youth organisations – use their religiosity as an inspiration and motivation for their engagement with society. Like the majority of young Egyptians, they feel marginalised and excluded from important decisions taken by both the regime and the older generation. They see problems in society – problems that neither the state nor initiatives from the outside have been able to solve. Inspired by Amr Khaled and others like him, they want to take responsibility and contribute to the solution of these problems and the creation of a more just Egyptian society.

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## Annexes

### Annex A: Glossary<sup>95</sup>

**Eid al Adha:** The Islamic New Year. An Islamic festival celebrated as a commemoration of Ibrahim's (Abraham's) willingness to sacrifice his son Ismael for Allah. Muslims who can afford to do so sacrifice their best domestic animals (usually sheep, but also camels, cows, and goats) as a symbol of this sacrifice. Eid al-Adha lasts for four days and starts on the 10th day of the month of Dhul Hijja of the lunar Islamic calendar, approximately 70 days after the end of the month of Ramadan.

**Da'wa:** The duty to inform non-believers of Islam.

**Eid al Fitr.** An Islamic holiday marking the end of Ramadan, the month of fasting.

**Fajr:** The first of the five daily prayers (*salat*), the early morning prayer, made between dawn and sunrise.

**Hadith:** Oral traditions relating to the words and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad. Hadith collections are regarded as important tools for determining the Sunna, or Muslim way of life, by all traditional schools of jurisprudence.

**Hajj:** The pilgrimage to Mecca. One of the five pillars of Islam.

**Hijab:** The word means 'to cover' and refers in some Arabic-speaking countries and Western countries primarily to women's head and body covering, but in Islamic scholarship, hijab is given the wider meaning of modesty, privacy and morality

**Iftar:** The evening meal that marks the end of the daily fast during the month of Ramadan.

**Niqab:** A veil which covers the face, worn by some Muslim women as a part of sartorial hijab. It is popular in the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf, in particular Saudi Arabia, but it can also be found in North Africa, Southeast Asia and the Indian subcontinent.

<sup>95</sup> Sources are Benthall (1999), Bæk Simonsen (2001), Esposito (2002) and the online encyclopedia [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)

**Sadaqa:** The word means to be truthful and refers to voluntary almsgiving and charity.

**Salafi:** The word “Salafi” derives from *salaf* which means to precede. The term *al-salaf al-salih* refers to the forefathers of Islam, the companions of the Prophet and the following two generations. A Salafi is someone who adheres to the example of the salaf and strictly follows the Quran and the Sunna as the only sources of religious understanding in preference to the texts of any of the schools.

**Salat:** The five daily ritual prayers that any Muslim should carry out. One of the five pillars of Islam.

**Sawm:** Fasting during Ramadan. One of the five pillars of Islam.

**Shahadah:** The profession of faith. One of the five pillars of Islam.

**Sunna:** The customs and habits of the Prophet Muhammad, narrated through a number of hadiths.

**Thawab:** The spiritual rewards or points given by Allah for good deeds performed by one. If a person has more positive points (thawab) than negative points (*ithim*), he or she will go to heaven, if not, to hell. If the two are equal, the person will be in limbo.

**Waqf (pl. Awqaf):** An Islamic endowment typically devoting a building or piece of land for religious or charitable purposes.

**Zakat:** The word derives from the verb *zaka*, meaning to purify. Zakat refers to the obligation for all Muslims to pay 2.5 percent of their wealth to the poor and needy. The guidelines for the payment of zakat are not described in the Quran but in the Sunna. Traditionally, the required annual amount was 1/40 of one’s wealth, but over the years the scholarly literature has laid down more specific rules. For instance, people whose wealth is below a certain threshold are not required to pay zakat. Zakat is one of the five pillars of Islam.

**Zakat al-fitr:** A duty on every Muslim to pay a share of his/her wealth to charitable purposes immediate after the whole month of Ramadan to bless his/her fast.

## **Annex B: Interview Guide**

### *Questions regarding the organisation*

#### *History*

When was the organisation established?  
Why was it established?  
Who were involved in the establishment?  
What does the name of the organisation mean?

#### *Identity*

What is the purpose of the organisation?  
What is its vision?  
How is this formulated?  
How is it communicated to participants?  
In what ways does it show in the organisation?  
How does this differ from other organisations?  
What role does Islam have in this vision?

In what ways is the organisation religious? Activities, structure, motivation, purpose etc.?  
Are there different ways of being Islamic?  
Does the organisation follow specific religious schools or movements – e.g. Salafi, Sufi, Wahabi etc.?  
What does this mean for the work of the organisation?

#### *Structure*

What is the institutional structure of the organisation?  
Does the organisation have any branches?  
If yes, what is the relation between the different branches? Are they autonomous or under the same leadership?  
Where do you work? (in what areas of the city/the country)  
Why here?  
Does the organisation have any connections to any mosques? In what ways?

#### *Decision-making structures*

Who are the person(s) in charge?  
How are they elected?  
What is their background – economic, educational, professional?

### *Participants*

What are the kinds or categories of participants – members, users, employees, volunteers etc.?

What do they do?

How many people in each category?

What is their background – economic, educational, professional?

What is the relationship between these different groups? How do they work together/communicate?

How many members does the organisation have?

How do you become a member?

Why do people become members?

How much time do they spend in the organisation?

Does the organisation have volunteers?

Why do people volunteer?

What do they do?

How much time do they spend in the organisation?

Does the organisation have salaried staff?

What kinds? What do they do?

Why do they choose to work for this organisation?

What are the organisation's target groups and users?

Is the target group religiously defined?

Why do people use this organisation?

How often do they use the organisation?

How do people know that this is an Islamic organisation?

How does the organisation signal its religiosity to potential participants?

Do you talk a lot about Islam? In what situations?

Are there any differences among participants in their perception of Islam and its role in the organisation?

### *Activities*

What are the activities of the organisation?

Why these activities?

What activities do you consider the most important? Why?



How many people participate in the activities?

Do the various activities have different target groups? (men/women, young people/children/adults etc.)

Who organises and carries out the activities?

Do the activities differ from the kinds of activities secular or non-religious organisations carry out? In what ways?

### *Economy*

How is the organisation financed? By whom?

(state, membership fees, private donations, foreign donors, aid agencies etc.)

### *Context*

What are the major problems in society today – and how should they be solved? In what ways does the organisation contribute to solving these problems? (development/charity?)

Do other civil society organisations try to solve these problems? If so, how?

How would you describe civil society in general?

What are the major and most influential civil society organisations – are any of these Islamic?

What are the relevant groupings and divides? Any conflicts? Over what?

What kinds of Islamic civil society organisations exist? What distinguishes one group from another?

How do you perceive the role of Islamic organisations in civil society and in society in general?

What is the general population's perception of the Islamic organisations?

What role do they play in people's daily life?

### *Cooperation and networks*

What is the relationship to other Islamic organisations, including the Muslim Brotherhood?

What is the relationship to non-Islamic organisations, including non-religious, atheist, Christian organisations? How does the organisation view non-religious organisations?

What is the relationship to state authorities?

What is the relationship to political parties and movements?

What is the relationship to international organisations?

Does the organisation cooperate with other organisations? If so, what organisations and in what ways?

Did you experience any differences working with Islamic organisations compared to non-Islamic organisations? What strengths and weaknesses do they present?

*Development/future*

How has the organisation developed since its establishment – size, activities, target group, area?

Have activities/structure/vision changed?

What were then main events in the history of the organisation?

How do you view the future of the organisation?

How do you view the future role and influence of the Islamic organisations?

Is it a strength or a weakness for an organisation to be religious? In what ways?

Will they grow in number? If so, why?

How do they influence society?

Do they have a political influence?

*Questions regarding the individual*

*Members/volunteers*

How did you first learn about the organisation?

How long have you been involved in the organisation?

How and why did you become involved in the organisation?

What motivated you to join?

Is it important to you that the organisation is Islamic? Why/why not?

Do you agree with the vision of the organisation? Why or why not?

What is your role/position in the organisation?

What do you do? What are your main responsibilities and activities in the organisation?

Why these responsibilities - how was this decided?

Have you always had the same position in the organisation or has your position changed?

Which activity(ies) do you consider to be the most important for the organisation?

How would you improve the activities if you could?

What is your relationship to other groups of participants?  
(users/members/employees/volunteers)

Will you stay involved in the organisation in the future? Why?

*Staff*

How did you first learn about the organisation?

How long have you worked for the organisation?

How and why did you become involved in the organisation?

What motivated you to seek the job?

Is it important to you that the organisation is Islamic? Why/why not?

Do you agree with the vision of the organisation? Why or why not? If not, is this problematic when carrying out your job?

What is your role/position in the organisation?

What do you do? What are your main responsibilities and activities in the organisation?

Why these responsibilities – how was this decided? Do you have a formal qualification to carry out this kind of job?

Have you always had the same position in the organisation, or has your position changed?

Which activity(ies) do you consider to be the most important for the organisation?

How would you improve the activities if you could?

What is your relationship to other groups of participants? (users/members/volunteers)

What are the differences between working in an Islamic and a non-Islamic organisation? Activities, colleagues, salary etc.

Will you keep your job in the organisation in the future? Why?

Would you continue working as a volunteer, if needed?

Would you consider becoming a member of the organisation?

*Users*

How did you first learn about the organisation?

How long have you used the organisation?

How and why did you start using the organisation?

Is it important to you that the organisation is Islamic? Why/why not?

Do you agree with the vision of the organisation? Why or why not?

What services do you receive from the organisation?

Are you satisfied with the services provided? Why/why not?

What activities do you participate in? Why these?

Which activity(ies) do you consider to be the most important for the organisation?

How would you improve the activities if you could?

What is your relationship to other groups of participants? (members/employees/volunteers)

Will you keep using the organisation in the future? Why?

## Annex C: Tables, Chapter 2

*Table II: Number and percentage of civil society organisations with a Muslim name<sup>96</sup>*

Category	Number	Percent
Social welfare organisations	83/881	9.4
Cultural associations	29/239	12.1
Sports, youth and scout organisations	6/264	2.3
Advocacy organisations (human rights, democracy, women's rights etc)	11/117	9.4
Research centres and think tanks	10/118	8.5
International non-governmental organisations	3/27	11.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>142/1646</b>	<b>8.6</b>

*Table III: The organisations included in the analysis, divided into sub-categories*

Types of organisations	Examples
General social welfare organisations	Al-Afaf, Al Fayhah, Al-Farouq, Green Crescent, Hamzah bin abd al Mutaleb, the Islamic Center Charity Society (including Abura Orphan Center in Jabal Hussein; Abu Dhar Al Rfai Community Center; and the Orphan's Care centre in Jabal Nathif), Islamic Science League Society and Urwa al-Wuthqa,
Cooperatives	Rural Anjara Cooperative Association, Rif Ladies Association, Fatima Sahra Association
Women's associations	Al Aqsa, Islamic Anwar al-Huda Welfare Associations, Khawla bint al Azwar and That al-Netaqueen.
Royal development NGOs	Tkiyet Um Ali, Jordan River Foundation, Queen Zein Institute for Development/ Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Human Development and Young Muslim Women's Association.
Youth organisations	Suna'a al-Hayah, Zedny
International organisations	International Islamic Charity Organisation

<sup>96</sup> The numbers have been calculated by the author using information from the Directory of Civil Society Organisations, Al-Urdun al-Jadid, 2006. The categories of professional associations, labour unions and employers' professional associations have not been included since they all have standard names that do not reveal anything about possible religious affiliations or orientation.

*Table IV: Overview of employees, volunteers/members and beneficiaries*

Organisation	Staff	Volunteers	Beneficiaries (annual)
Al-Afaf Welfare Association	4	2-300	Organisation of marriages for 100 couples, provision of 3.000 loans, 10.000 participants in courses
Al Aqsa	-	15	Financial aid to 10 families, social club for 10-20 old people, education and training courses for women
Al Fayhah	-	3	Financial and material aid to 390 families, 170 students, 18 sick people, 7 handicapped
Al-Farouq Welfare Association	80	100	Financial and material aid, education and health services to 1.200 families (7.000 people)
Islamic Anwar al-Huda Welfare Association	-	9	Financial and material aid to 92 families, recreational courses for 100 women
Fatima Sahra Association	12	85	60 children in kindergarten, job assistance to 12 women, food for 12 families, workshops for 50 people, loans to 20 women
Green Crescent	4	?	Distribution of 6.000 school bags, 2.000 food packages, 3.500 iftar meals
Hamzah bin abd al-Mutaleb Educ. & Islamic Charity Society	6	-	Financial aid to 19 children (orphans)
International Islamic Charity Organisation	5	-	Financial aid to 220 students and 300 orphans, distribution of 5.000 school bags, 2.500 food packages, courses for 2-300 people, loans to 600 families, building of 25 mosques
Islamic Charity Center Society <sup>97</sup> (ICCS)	3.400	700	Financial and material aid, education and health services to 13.500 orphans, 6.000 families (35.000 people), 1.000 students.
Abura Orphan Center, Jabal Hussein, ICCS	30	20-25	Financial and material aid, education and health services to 600 orphans, 300 families, 400 women

<sup>97</sup> The ICCS numbers include figures from Abura Orphan Center, Abu Dhar al-Rfai Community Center and the Orphan's Care Center Jabal Natif.

*Table IV (continued)*

Organisation	Staff	Volunteers	Beneficiaries (annual)
Abu Dhar Al Rfai Community Center, Nasr Area, ICCS	11	14-16	Financial and material aid, education and health services to 153 orphans, 45 university students, 276 poor families, 500 children
Orphan's Care Center, Jabal Nathif, ICCS	15	20	Financial and material aid, education and health services to 320 families, 100 orphans
Islamic Science League Society	-	50-100	Financial aid to 50 families
Jordan River Foundation	150	?	26 economic empowerment projects, home for 32 abused children
Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Development (JOHUD)	450	4.000	Cooperation with 50 community centers, including financial aid, training and technical support
Khawla bint al Azwar	-	10	Training and education of more than 1.000 women
Rif Ladies Association	10	-	Loans to 300 women, training of 100 women
Rural Anjara Cooperative Association	35	-	Financial aid to 230 orphans, medicine to 20 families, loans to 300 families
Suna'a al-Hayah	1	700	Distribution of 3.500 food packages, training and education for 100 children
That al-Netaqueen	12	50	Training and recreational courses for 2-300 women, financial and material aid to 120-150 families
Tkiyet Um Ali	?	?	Material aid to 3.000 families (15.000 individuals), 18 schools, provision of jobs and loans to 91 families
Urwa al-Wuthqa	-	7	Financial and material aid to 150-300 families
Young Muslim Women's Association	100	100	Education for 250 handicapped children, young people and adults, college students
Zedny	2	100	1.000 participants in courses, distribution of iftar meals for 700 orphans, clothes and gifts for 200 orphans

*Table V: Kinds of activities*

Activity	Number	Percentage
Financial aid	16/24 <sup>98</sup>	66.6
Material aid, incl. sacrificial lambs, iftar etc.	16	66.6
Education and awareness-raising (adults)	11	45.8
Vocational training	11	45.8
Microfinance loans and income-generating aid	10	41.7
Education and awareness-raising (children and youth)	10	41.7
Facilitation of jobs	10	41.7
Health care	9	37.5
Student support	5	20.8
Child care, incl. kindergarten, orphanages etc.	5	20.8
Cooperative activities	3	12.5

<sup>98</sup> The three ICCS centres are entered as separate organisations: the ICCS headquarters are not included.



## Annex D: Tables, Chapter 3

*Table I: The organisations included in the analysis, divided into sub-categories*

Types of organisations	Examples
General social welfare organisations	Bedaya for Developing Education and Culture, Al-Jama'iyya al-Shar'iyya, Al-Arqeba wal Tarbeya al-Islamiyya Association, Mahmoud Mosque Association, Raba'a Al-Adawiyya Association
Youth organisations	Alashanik Ya Baladi organisation for Sustainable Development, Bayan, Boraq, Future Protectors Association, The International Muslim Youth Association, Mazeed, Meshwar Organization for Community Development, Misr Shoryan al-Ata'a, Nahdet El Mahrousa, Resala, Sama, Suna'a al-Hayah, Youth Association for Population and Development, Zedny
Student organisations	The Annual Conference for Engineering Students (ACES)
Sports, cultural and scientific organisations	The Cultural Centre of Manshiet Nasser, Youth Centre of Manshiet Nasser, Cairo for Culture and Dialogue

*Table II: Overview of participants and beneficiaries in Muslim youth organisations*

Organisation	Employees	Board members	Members/volunteers	Beneficiaries
Alashanik Ya Baladi Association for Sustainable Development	4	10	Approx. 400	Poor families, in Old Cairo, in particular young people lacking language, computer and vocational skills, illiterate women, and under stimulated children
Bayan	0	4	25 active (55 in the database)	Until now approx. 1,000 mostly young people (students and college graduates)
Boraq	0	10	Approx. 150 active (approx. 1,000 in the database)	Delivers 600-650 hot meals to people in poor areas; visits an orphanage with approx. 100 orphans; visits to kidney patients
Mazeed	0	?	50 active (approx. 130 in the database)	Poor people: delivering 40-50,000 hot meals annually; selling of cheap second-hand clothes
Misr Shoryan al-Ata'a	2	30	Approx. 60-70 active	70-80 poor out-patients and their families; cancer patients; medical students and their families; patients in remote poor areas; delivering food bags to poor families
Resala	Approx. 1,000	10	Approx. 50,000 active	Orphans; poor families; blind people; sick and disabled people; deaf and mute people; children and young people (tutoring, vocational training, computer skills)
Sama	0	?	?	Poor families; young people
Suna'a al-Hayah	4	7	1,700 regular (more than 4,000 in the database)	Poor families; orphans; elderly; young people; children; disabled people
Zedny	10	10	100 organisers 17 instructors	Young people (students and graduates, primarily from the middle class)

*Table III: Activities of Muslim youth organisations*

Organisation	Activities
Alashanik Ya Baladi Association for Sustainable Development	<p>Economic empowerment programme, including micro-credits, vocational training centre and career opportunity office</p> <p>Education programme, including computer learning centre, language programme, ethics and morals programme and illiteracy eradication programme</p> <p>Children development programme, including art expression programme, human development programme and tutoring programme</p> <p>Social entrepreneur programme, including courses in public speaking, leadership, marketing and innovation, time management, change management, career planning, power of teams, emotional intelligence, English language and computer skills.</p>
Bayan	<p>Courses in soft skills, including time management, presentation skills, practical exercises, communication skills, the art of dealing with personality types, stress management, negotiation skills</p> <p>Courses in career management, including practical exercises, decision making, dealing with your boss, dealing with difficult people, conflict resolution, creative thinking, balancing work and life, career management</p> <p>English courses, including conversation, business writing, TOEFL, TOEIC</p> <p>Safety courses</p> <p>Business courses</p>
Boraq	<p>Computer help and developing of open-source software to blind people; helping blind university students</p> <p>Business course at Faculty of Engineering, Ain Shams University</p> <p>Clothes exhibition projects</p> <p>Delivering of 600-650 hot meals weekly</p> <p>Emotional and educational support to orphans</p> <p>Visits to kidney patients at the hospitals, bringing them money and teaching the handicrafts</p> <p>Recycling project</p> <p>“The bag of good”: annual food distribution project during Ramadan</p>
Mazeed	<p>Recycling project</p> <p>Social assessment and effective distribution of food, including case studies of families, packing and distribution of food backs in Cairo and outside</p> <p>Clothes exhibitions project</p>

*Table III (continued)*

Organisation	Activities
Misr Shoryan al-Ata'a	<p>Blood donation campaigns for hospitals and awareness campaign of donation in cooperation with Resala once a month</p> <p>Medical awareness project in cooperation with the Egyptian Forum Organisation</p> <p>Economic, social and emotional care for about 70-80 poor out-patients and their families</p> <p>Complete care of cancer patients and their relatives</p> <p>Advocacy programme for obtaining health insurance for medical students and their parents</p> <p>Provision of medical equipment to poor medical students</p> <p>Medical caravans: small, condensed hospitals with doctors, medical students and others travelling to villages in Upper Egypt and the Delta. Assessment and screening of poor patients in a village.</p>
Resala	<p>Orphanages</p> <p>Collection and selling of used clothes</p> <p>Help to poor people (food, mattresses, financial help for marriage, school fees, medicine)</p> <p>Help to blind people (education, reading and recording books)</p> <p>Help to sick and disabled people</p> <p>Help to deaf and mute</p> <p>Blood donation campaigns</p> <p>Recycling project</p> <p>Resala merchandise: tissues, pens, etc.</p> <p>Computer courses</p> <p>Sewing and drawing workshops</p> <p>Private tutoring to poor students</p> <p>Publicity activities: visiting companies, schools and clubs to tell about Resala</p> <p>Mother's Day event</p>
Sama	<p>Clothes exhibition project</p> <p>Provision of training to 400 people from Shobra in different fields, such as leadership, time management, and teambuilding.</p> <p>Distribution of food from rich to poor people in Shobra</p> <p>"The Future Guardians Project": an international programme for combating drugs addiction among youth</p>

*Table III (continued)*

Suna'a al-Hayah	<p>Computer courses</p> <p>Encouraging and helping youth to make small projects</p> <p>Paper collection and recycling</p> <p>Handicraft production and training workshops</p> <p>Psychological support programme</p> <p>Charitable activities: financial support to poor families, orphans, poor couples getting married; provision medicine and medical aid for poor patients; provision of seasonal aids like clothes, blankets, school requirements and Ramadan bags to poor people; monthly trips for orphans and the elderly</p> <p>Social awareness campaigns: orphans and disabled; drug addiction; smoking, child rearing and handling of teenagers.</p> <p>Visits and support to orphanages and old people's institutions</p> <p>Human development courses and training programmes.</p> <p>Activities for the disabled: courses in how to care for those with special needs</p> <p>Workshop and lectures in applied art, literature, music acting, directing and music production</p>
Zedny	<p>Human and career development courses, including leadership, coaching, time management, communication, planning, mind mapping, self-learning, ethics, advanced marketing, How to be proactive, Think differently, marketing planning, business planning, job hunting, stock market</p> <p>Courses in managing NGOs</p> <p>Human development courses for children</p>